

Despite Roadblocks, Optical Steps Up to Meet Today's Challenges



Trying to describe the business outlook for the optical industry in 2017, phrases like “cautious optimism” come to mind. Economic indicators show that optical made incremental progress in 2016, with sales in most product categories up slightly over the previous year.

The latest VisionWatch Consumer Barometer, covering the 12-month period ending December 2016, reflects a modest 1.5 percent overall increase in revenues for vision care products and services in the U.S. compared to the prior year period. The total vision care market, as defined by The Vision Council's VisionWatch survey, reached \$40.36 billion in the 12-month period, and includes dollars spent at retail at all retail types at any retail location and spent on the sale of either spectacle lenses (including Rx Sun), frames, contact lenses, plano sunglasses, OTC readers or revenue earned by refractive surgery or eye examinations. With the exception of refractive surgery, each one of those categories saw increases in the 12-month period versus the same period a year ago.

So far, that modest progress appears to be

continuing, according to anecdotal evidence based on feedback from optical retailers, wholesalers and ECPs gathered by *Vision Monday*. Several retailers even reported an uptick in foot traffic and sales following the outcome of a particularly contentious and divisive presidential election year. It seemed as if consumers were relieved that the uncertainty surrounding the changeover to a new presidential administration was over.

Optical's optimism is being further fueled by the gathering momentum on Wall Street. Despite some trepidation, the stock market has defied expectations from some analysts who predicted a downturn before the inauguration in January. In fact, the stock market has taken off like never before—the Dow Jones Industrial average reached 20,000 for the first time ever on Jan. 25. According to a report in *The Wall Street Journal*, “the Federal Reserve's apparent confidence in economic growth and investors' hopes that the Trump administration would spur that growth drove the achievement. The early March increase to 21,000 points from 20,000 also marked the

index's fastest 1,000-point gain ever.”

Still there are many factors that could roil the U.S. economy in the months ahead, such as changes to international trade agreements that could drive up the cost of imports sharply, increase domestic manufacturing costs and reduce consumer spending. On the positive side, employers may benefit from tax incentives for businesses, leading to job creation and growth opportunities.

The optical economy is also in flux. Changes in state regulations for vision care providers and consumer access to vision care insurance could significantly impact consumer behavior.

Ongoing consolidation and mergers at all levels of the industry, the rising influence of e-commerce and social media and the increasing availability of telemedicine are just a few of the factors that could affect consumer buying patterns in the near term.

To take optical's pulse, *VM* asked about prospects for 2017, consumer mood and buying habits, the effects of cultural and political changes and potential business opportunities. ■

—VM Staff

Metro Optics Bronx, New York



“Elections in a presidential year almost always deflate moods and result in decreased spending habits. Once it's over, however, people tend to move on with their lives.”

— John Bonizio, Co-Owner

Last year started off on an excellent note. It appeared by mid-year that we would exceed projections of a 10 percent same store revenue increase, but a slowdown in the last quarter leading up to the election, and a fire that destroyed one of our locations (on Thanksgiving weekend) reduced revenue below expectations in the fourth quarter. So by Dec. 31, we ended up just below projections.

2017 is off to a better than expected start (the warm weather helps!), and based on minimum wage increases and inflationary increases, we are expecting reduced store sales (i.e., revenue from three stores instead of four) to actually exceed last year's revenue totals. With the reduction in overhead, we're actually way ahead of net projections.

Elections in a presidential year almost always deflate moods and result in decreased spending habits. Once it's over, however, people tend to move on with their lives. This election was like none we've seen and the early projection from my seat is that it will be good for eyewear buyers.

Impacts of the Election

Those who are excited by the outcome of the election will spend because they believe that the economy will improve and enhance their lot in life so they will treat themselves to eyewear that represents this point of view. Those who are disheartened by the results will recognize that they have to live with them and will justify a feel-good enhancement of their facial accessories. Either position presents an opportunity for the astute ECP.

Of course, how we will be affected is the question.

Uncertainty is never good for the markets or the economy (unless you're heavily invested in precious metals). Protests, foreign aggression, terrorism all play a part to one degree or another. One day it's business as usual, the next....

Acquisitions are an opportunity that may come from the consolidation of the industry and the desire of small practitioners to cash out. Challenges come from the very real fact that the future of the industry is not as predictable as it once was. The effect of the internet, insurance proliferation, consolidation of industry giants are all uncertain factors that require very careful strategies when it comes to growth of this type. It may be the smarter approach to just lean back and watch for now.

When it comes to our marketing efforts, we're launching a new e-commerce site to give patients an easier way to order contacts and basic eyewear packages, and we're promoting a vision club plan to attract patients without coverage. We're also enhancing lens offerings to give presbyopic patients more of a selection for particular use. And we're dedicating more resources to local efforts and the smart use of social media to generate a buzz that drives business to our door.

Personalized campaigns on our own social media channels, linked to networks in the community with followings help us spread the word that we have specialty products like Chanel, Cartier, Gucci, electronic eyewear products, etc. The idea is to promote the company as an authority on what's new so we can be seen as the expert on the easy stuff, which is what we sell more of than anything else.

Cherry Optical, Inc. Green Bay, Wisconsin



“Having an administration that favors a pro-growth, lower-tax policy can only help.”

— Adam Cherry

In 2016, we had a very positive year at Cherry Optical, Inc. Our investments in quality laboratory opticians, sales representatives and technology have

begun showing a very nice return. The challenge and opportunity of being a “non-vision plan” and independent laboratory remained, but there are still plenty of eyecare professionals looking for a high-quality laboratory to take care of their private-pay business.

We expect a similar pattern to continue in 2017. We've made additional investments in equipment, technology and people as part of our plan for continued, sustainable growth. We believe that if we continue to focus on improving what we do that we will be rewarded with additional business.

Trying to over-analyze the industry or the marketplace doesn't accomplish much. Listening to customers, improving operations, training employees and reinvesting in ourselves will be the most important part of maintaining growth. I expect 2017 to be a successful year for Cherry Optical, Inc.

The Rise of Disposable Income

The economy, better quality wages, and maybe a bit of fashion trends may affect the market more than anything. When consumers have money (or more money) they are more willing to spend, and when it remains “fashionable” to wear eyewear, we have the ability to capitalize on this trend to grow our slice of the health care/fashion industry. Additionally, consumers having more disposable income means they'll be enjoying life; usually doing so outside—which also provides potential for sunwear.

As far as the business outlook goes, I think there could be some extremely positive things, especially for U.S. manufacturing and independent, U.S.-based optical laboratories. The skill set needed at a modern optical laboratory is more advanced than ever before. R&D, re-investment and skilled-labor development are a must.

Having an administration that favors a pro-growth, lower-tax policy can only help. Will the world change in 365 days? Absolutely not. But if changes are put in place that strongly encourage reinvestment, we'll all be on the track for great success.

Let's also consider how changes in trade regulations may affect the major lens manufacturers that have invested heavily in outsourcing to Mexico, Thailand and other countries. These manufacturers have taken advantage of lower labor costs and reduced regulation from agencies such as OSHA and EPA. But having a president that puts America first could bring production of their lenses back to the U.S. It would raise production costs, but also create jobs. That could have a major impact on the future

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of U.S. optical labs.

By constantly becoming a better optical laboratory we have infinite potential to grow. We say here that our goal isn't "total world domination." We leave that to the "big guys." We're simply looking to be the best optical laboratory possible.

As we work toward achieving that goal, we'll achieve a lot of positive things. The "by far" biggest opportunity to grow our business and the entire eyecare industry is increased awareness of the value and importance of routine eye examinations.

Brooklyn Spectacles Williamsburg, New York



"I believe for 2017, the competition will be even fiercer. The big will get bigger, we will see more mergers and buy-outs as companies are holding hands to stay competitive."

- Jenny Ma, Founder/Owner

Last year was a year of ups and downs. From the industry side, many ECPs are tired of large monopolizing companies, so more and more buyers are favoring independent brands, such as Brooklyn Spectacles, that has a local brand story together with frames of good quality, at a price point that's accessible among consumers, and offers great profit margin to business owners. However, with the quick expansion of a discount eyewear brand from on-line to offline, opening many brick-and-mortar stores in the most popular areas, that has definitely created some waves and unfair competitions.

I believe for 2017, the competition will be even fiercer. The big will get bigger, we will see more merger and buy-outs as companies are holding hands to stay competitive. So we, the local independent brands and shops, must continue to bring more and better product offerings, better lenses, faster technology, and more consistent social media marketing to stay in touch with the needs of your customers.

Consumer Spending Is Down

I think consumers are buying less these year. The mood in the U.S. hasn't been great due to political reasons; and the U.S. dollar is very strong right now, which definitely hampers the tourists shopping behavior. Brooklyn Spectacles' flagship store is located on Bedford Ave., in Williamsburg, Brooklyn—the equivalent of SoHo in Manhattan, where a large percentage of our foot-traffic is from tourism. We definitely saw fewer tourists in 2016 compared to 2105.

When there's still so much unknown when it comes to tax reform and business reform, many people are holding back from making big purchases or big business decisions. I foresee things will come to a more clear picture after tax season, one way or the other.

For Brooklyn Spectacles, the biggest opportunity is potentially opening more stores that could further highlight the brand; and international markets. The biggest challenge is to get more ECPs to support independent brands as opposed to monopolized brands that are being made cheaply for an unworthy price!

As far as products goes, we're making more frames using top quality acetate and hardware from Italy and Japan. We're paying close attention to customers' demand in eyewear fashion; we believe colorful palettes and combination frames are the trend for 2017.

Every press mention, every like, every media exposure, and every celebrity who are wearing our frame now is due to them really liking the frame/brand for what it is. Not to brag, but some of them are: Ted Allen, Paul Marcarelli, and I personally helped Courtney Cox in selecting her pair at our flagship store.

I truly believe that the best marketing is from the ground-up—make beautiful products and sell for as a reasonable price as possible—word of mouth referrals and building a fan-base organically is the best way.

Business for us was very good in 2016 and we had strong organic growth in most of our businesses and product categories. We start our fiscal year on Dec. 1 and our first quarter of 2017 has been a little softer than Q1 of 2016 but I am cautiously optimistic for 2017.

Throughout the first three quarters of 2016, I thought consumers were very optimistic, we experienced a significant slowdown in October and November. It may have been due to political uncertainty or just a normal slowdown after several strong quarters.

Walman Minneapolis, Minnesota



"The overall market seems very flat, so if you want to grow above low single digit numbers you are going to need to take market share from your competitors."

- Marty Bassett, President

Growing Market Share

The overall market seems very flat, so if you want to grow above low single digit numbers you are going to need to take market share from your competitors. Hopefully, we will continue to see growth in exams driven by the Think About Your Eyes initiative. It's more productive for everyone if we can grow the market.

As for new products, every Walman division is continually working to advance products, services and technologies across the eyecare spectrum in support of the optical industry, eyecare practices and eyecare patients alike.

Here are some examples. Our division X-Cel Specialty Contacts announced the expansion of our Atlantis Scleral product line with two new lens options: Atlantis Scleral Multifocal and Atlantis Scleral 3D-Vault with Limbal Control Technology. The enhancements allow for superior vision and customization for the patient while making it even easier for practitioners to fit patients with Atlantis products.

Also, ADO Practice Solutions is expanding their growth-focused and cost-savings programs to give eyecare practices the much-needed edge to succeed in the competitive marketplace. DONE4YOU is a personalized ECP marketing program and the PEAK Performance Program is an advanced benchmarking service. Both of these comprehensive services help practices uncover new patient opportunities and grow their business.

As far as our marketing efforts go, we've found content marketing, social media and e-mail marketing are the strongest methods to share the Walman story. Specifically, you'll see Walman Optical, our lab division, continue to share their strong focus on enhancing the patient experience through ECPs' independent power of choice. The expansive and unbiased list of products, programs and education Walman Optical offers empowers ECPs to decide what's best for their patients.

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Eyétique Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



Believe it or not, managed care has helped our business to grow. It promotes annual eye exams, and our clients want to use their benefits.

- Brad Childs, COO

Business was fantastic for us in 2016 showing above industry average for growth and we expect store over store growth to continue into 2017.

Believe it or not, managed care has helped our business to grow, you may ask why? It promotes annual eye exams, and our clients want to use their benefits. They want to feel like they are getting some value for a deduction of premiums out of their paychecks. We continue to deliver top notch service and world class products, so it is a recipe for growth

We never worry about anything that we can't control. We stay the course and provide an amazing experience no matter what.

Acquisitions and new store openings are the biggest opportunities for our team. We have a great foundation with a beautiful building that we call our headquarters. This is the hub of the entire operation. It has not even come close to meeting its full expectation of production and therefore we will continue to seek great opportunities to continue to open doors.

Importance of Staff + New Products

Over the last few years, we have been very fortunate to have built a team that just simply works hard and gets it done. They believe in the direction we are going in and they and want to grow as well.

As for products, we brought in some different products this year as it relates to color deficiencies and this has actually worked. When I say it has worked, I mean for the patient, and to see parents see their children in full color for the first time, or to see a leaf on a tree is amazing.

We also continue to work hard on our Made In America collection of eyewear, which has been made

here for over 20 years—Norman Childs eyewear. And we continue to work the value segment as well with chromos eyewear. For every frame sold, we provide an eye exam, frames and lenses to children in need right here in the city of Pittsburgh.

Our ad campaign with our celebrity following has been the longest running ad in the history of our company. We use high end magazines, billboards, some TV, and just try to have some fun with it.

Chang Eye Group Pittsburgh and Ellwood City, Pennsylvania



“Eyewear is not only a medical device, it's part of your wardrobe, worn on your most recognizable feature, your face!”

- Mary Beth Carroll, Optician

Each year, we review annual sales in our optical shop to determine where we can look to grow our business. This past year, our optical team worked together to achieve higher bottom line growth within our current patient base. We have identified two areas of focus, including growing an “eyewear wardrobe” and “task eyewear.”

Each member of our optical team wears a variety of glasses. This grew from a love of all the new fashion frames now available. We get very excited with new styles, and enjoy wearing them. Through heavy discounts we have all grown our personal eyewear wardrobes. We noticed our patients commenting on the fact that every time they visit our practice we all have on a new frame style, or a color to coordinate with our outfits.

We have worked with individual reps who provide us with great discounts on frames, and paired them with lenses from CLEARi lab so that opticians, the front desk staff and our technicians can afford their own wardrobe.

Multiple Pairs Boost Profits

The patients have become so accustomed to seeing us wearing newer styles and colors that there is a natural progression to talk about having multiple pairs of glasses. We remind people that they own several pair of shoes—at least a black pair and a brown pair, and that they would never wear tennis shoes with a suit or a dress. Eyewear is like that, too. It is not only a medical device, it's part of your wardrobe, worn on your most recognizable feature, your face!

In addition to fashion, technology is contributing to our bottom line. A majority of our sales involve progressive lens. We are hearing from many of our patients that regular progressives are just not cutting it for those sitting in front of a computer screen at work, which today is everyone. They want greater intermediate distance correction.

We are expanding our sales in the area of task lenses or “computer” eyewear. Once they start wearing these lenses they are hooked. Now when they are considering new glasses it's two pair; one pair for dress, one pair for the computer. And for those patients who are in their 20s through mid 40s the Eyezen+ lens, which eases eye strain at the computer and reading, is a great choice.

So from our love of fashion eyewear we have seen our sales increase in multiple pair sales. We have also focused on mid-range priced fashion sunglasses. Kate Spade, Bobby Brown and Ray-Ban, just to name a few, are high fashion and great quality, at an affordable price. Coupling these frames with packaged lenses makes an easier add-on sale for prescription sunglasses. All of this in our quest to expand our patients' eyewear fashion wardrobe.

We are a new practice that opened in 2014. In 2016 we saw a 50 percent increase over 2015. So far in 2017, we are up 19 percent over last year and I think we should continue to increase at about that rate this year.

With the uncertainty at the end of last year we've seen a decrease in our customers' willingness to spend. This year, people are more eager to spend money on “luxury items” such as plano goggles and sunglasses, as well as more lens treatment options.

We are located in somewhat conservative area, but we continue to see increases in spending. Given the gains in the stock market, I think consumer confidence in our area is pretty high right now. We have yet to see any indicators of “fear to spend.”

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Collegiate Peaks Eyecare Buena Vista, Colorado



“Given the gains in the stock market, I think consumer confidence in our area is pretty high right now. We have yet to see any indicators of ‘fear to spend.’”

- Matthew L. Scott, OD

Expanding Services, Diversifying Product

Our biggest opportunity is the introduction of a second exam lane which will allow for more patients to be seen in an eight-hour day. The new lane features state-of-the-art equipment, including a new Topcon Maestro OCT and fundus camera.

We also introduced Costa sunglasses which should perform well throughout the summer, particularly with tourists. And we've added State frames to diversify our product offering.

We will be incorporating digital media platforms throughout the office, including video displays. Plus we've added music, both inside and outside, to enhance the overall shopping and customer experience.

Wisconsin Vision New Berlin, Wisconsin



“I think that the business climate is positive at this time and as long as employment remains in a growth pattern we can expect that our business will follow this trend.”

- Darren Horndasch, President and CEO

Business in 2016 was about as we expected—nothing too dramatic in terms of same store sales. For 2017, we expect that there may be a bit more of a lift now that the “election cloud” is past

and we are now into a new presidential term. Hopefully the emphasis will be on jobs and economic growth. In addition, with the opening of two new locations and the relocation of another, we will see a lift from this activity as well.

We definitely saw the pace of eyeglass orders slow down during the months between August and the first part of December. Again, I am going to attribute part of this to the election cycle and a wait and see attitude.

Just look at the stock market and how it is now responding to the new administration. I think that the business climate is positive at this time and as long as employment remains in a growth pattern we can expect that our business will follow this trend.

Greater Efficiencies to Meet Growing Demands

While there are opportunities for growth there are also challenges. Much of our business is derived by managing relationships: patients, employers, and vision managed care. It's not a simple thing anymore to sell glasses, contacts and eye exams.

With this relationship dynamic, we, the provider, are asked to do much more today: accept deeper discounts, report more pathology, be aware that we simply cannot expect to be in network when new locations are added, accept the fact that managed vision care is offering our patients “on-line” buying opportunities, and deal with hundreds of employer plans with one managed vision care plan, all without disrupting the relationship dynamic.

However, where there are challenges there are opportunities for us to become experts in managing these relationships as seamlessly as possible, thereby maintaining and growing the share of the vision-need pie. We learn to become more efficient by reflecting on our business model and performing at a higher level.

As for new products, there are a number of technology introductions. Some are new and some are a continual rollout. First, we will be continuing to implement visual acuity systems replacing our old projectors and screens. Next, we have been working closely with Optos to continue to introduce their ultra-widefield, high resolution digital retinal imaging systems to other markets within our company.

Our recent TV branding campaign that we ran regarding our free school program resonated with such positive results that our plan is now to add and continue to “pepper” in such ads along with our standard call to action commercials. Also, we have been getting great results in all markets with our digital click through-rates. Over the past several years we have taken the opportunity to try

different forms of digital advertising and really going after the area that has the best results.

Rochester Optical Rochester, New York



“The \$49 billion Essilor and Luxottica merger is definitely the optical news of the year. We believe it reinforced why so many ECPs value working with independently owned and operated optical labs.”

- Patrick Ho, President

Significant investments in proven leadership and implementing process improvement procedures in 2016 continue to excite our current customer base. We were able to demonstrate steady quality and service level improvements that set us up for sustainable growth in 2017. Competition in the wholesale optical industry is strong, but we're excited to see ample opportunities to expand, especially as an independent lab.

Wholesale customers are seeking out vendors who can offer quality products at competitive prices; but service level and convenience are becoming more and more important. We strive to provide ECP customers with exceptional support and offer online ordering tools to make buying easy.

Capability is another critical consideration, as customers seek out full-service labs to build long-term partnerships. We've added another Leybold AR coater to expand capacity to meet demands; and continual innovations in new products keep us ahead of the curve. Our customers have confidence in our ability to process a wide range of complex jobs, which encourages loyalty and contributes to our sales growth.

The \$49 billion Essilor and Luxottica merger is definitely the optical news of the year. We believe it reinforced why so many ECPs value working with independently owned and operated optical labs, and are excited to continue filling this need. Our hope is that we can earn the business of many ECPs looking for independent alternatives in 2017.

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ROMCO Super-Extended Range Polycarbonate Stock Lenses and our new PolyShade85™ sun lenses are two products with massive potential in 2017.

Products That Differentiate

The biggest challenge to growing sales for these particular products is exposure and messaging the benefits. Now more than ever, individual ECPs need to keep up with big-box retailers offering low price loss leaders; and our products are designed to help them stay competitive.

We make proprietary digital free-form prescription lenses, specialty frames and accessories for smart glasses including Microsoft HoloLens, Epson Moverio BT-300, Intel Recon Jet, and the most popular virtual reality devices like Oculus Rift and HTC Vive. We have launched UnderRx frame collection designed to accommodate VR goggles without compromising fashion and comfort. Our product portfolio for wearables is designed to allow the 2/3 of the populations who require some sort of vision correction to fully experience smart glasses. While most of our sales for this product category are currently direct to consumer through our technology partners, the ECP channel opportunity is growing.

Pacific EyeCare Port Orchard, Washington



“We believe our destiny depends on how well we are able to control those things within the four walls of our office, which we have direct control over, no matter what the cultural and political climate might end up being in 2017.”

**- W. Earl Buchanan, OD,
one of the owners of the practice.**

Business in our office grew in 2016, as compared to 2015. We have established a growth goal of 8 percent for 2017 and we optimistically expect to exceed it.

If the first six weeks of the new Trump administration are an indicator, we'd say that the future looks

promising. However, we believe our destiny depends on how well we are able to control those things within the four walls of our office, which we have direct control over, no matter what the cultural and political climate might end up being in 2017.

We had tremendous growth in Transitions products in 2016. We must continue to ‘prescribe,’ and not just recommend, products that are not only cutting edge, but also products that protect the health of our patients’ eyes for the future.

We are continually striving to meet patient expectations in eyecare and products and searching for ways to make our brand stand out from the competition. As Millennials take over for Baby Boomers in spending power, our biggest challenge is being appealing to both generations concerning their buying habits and the value they expect without sacrificing our standards in care, service and products.

Creating Cross-Generational Appeal

Our goal this year is to reach 70-plus percent Transitions use by our patient base. Also, we are discussing methods of gaining market share used by online sellers and how we might incorporate this into our business model.

Service is something we are always tweaking so that we can improve on our patient experience. We believe strongly that patient care and service are number one and as patient expectations and experience are met, our sales goal will take care of itself.

Our marketing is primarily internal marketing. Referral by satisfied patients has been our best marketing tool and we will continue to do this. We are adapting our electronic communication methods of marketing, enabling us to maintain market share of the younger generations as well as conventional methods to keep up with our senior patients.

Last year was our first full year of operation, and it went better than we had hoped. In our business, we expect 2017 to be busier, with the combination of previous and new patients.

From January to September, we were tracking very well but then the mood shifted drastically in October. Results for October and the first half of November were poor, as number of patients dropped off and the higher end patient became more scarce. As soon as the election was over, we saw a big uptick in patient volume and dollars per transaction.

Springfield Family Vision Springfield, Missouri



“Our biggest opportunity is to be able to accommodate more patients without sacrificing patient experience.”

- Scot McElvaine and Katie McElvaine, OD

January and February 2017 have been terrific months and we expect growth from 2016 numbers every month this year.

Our biggest opportunity is to be able to accommodate more patients without sacrificing patient experience. Staffing is our biggest challenge—we want to add staff who can make customers feel like they are the only patient here.

Branding Through Social Media

Our second biggest opportunity is to continue to grow our optical by adding frame lines that are capturing trends and are high quality and good values for their respective price points. We curate our frame selection, so space is always a bit limited.

Over the past year, we have added frame lines consistent with our commitment to excellence. Von Arkel Switzerland has been a wonderful addition to our product mix, offering extremely high quality products with a luxurious and lightweight feel.

Instagram and Facebook have been inexpensive and effective ways to get our brand message out. Instagram has probably been the best social medium for us. It allows us to share some of our style and personality before people walk through our door. You can follow us @springfield_family_vision on Instagram. ■

Vision Expo East Preview

Show Organizers Announce Innovative New Education Content at Vision Expo East

ALEXANDRIA, Va.—Numerous innovative programs have been added to the education curriculum at International Vision Expo East 2017, taking place at the Javits Center in New York, according to an announcement from show organizers. Registration is now open for Vision Expo East featuring education from March 30 to April 2 and exhibits from March 31 to April 3.

“Vision Expo East 2017 features over 300 hours of continuing education, including 20 specialty tracks,” said Mark Dunbar, OD, FAAO, co-chairman, Conference Advisory Board. “Attendees have access to endless program choices developed and delivered by the industry’s most prestigious lecturers, which is just one of the reasons why 99 percent of eyecare professionals attending say they gain valuable insights at International Vision Expo that will have a positive impact on their practice.”

The attendee-favorite Global Contact Lens Forum returns as a “meeting within a meeting”, with a new format offering direct access to thought leaders discussing the future of the contact lens practice, along with the latest advancements and critical business strategies.

The Ocular Surface Disease and Wellness Symposium will teach attendees how an ocular practice can mirror a preventative care model to better diagnose and treat patients, and the expertise needed to recognize dry eye diseases.

Additionally, Vision Expo has partnered with Google and Marketing4ECPs to share techniques to optimize technology to grow business.

“Vision Expo is noted for its diversified curriculum applicable to all eyecare providers, covering the latest hot-topics,” said Ben Gaddie, OD, FAAO, co-chairman, Conference Advisory Board. “This year, we are excited to unveil an innovative collaboration with the biggest name in technology. As the global hub for the eyecare industry, we’re bringing attendees a high-value experience throughout all four days.”

New education programs at International Vision Expo East 2017 will include:

- The all-new Vision Series format allows attendees to continue learning over lunch while industry leaders address the latest clinical innovations.
- Building on its success and high demand from Vision Expo West, Vision Expo East will host a new, expand-



ed Scleral Lens Track including a hands-on workshop. Attendees will gain a thorough understanding of the scleral lens fitting process and advanced problem solving techniques.

- Attendees will learn from the next generation of industry leaders at the Intrepid Talks, where members of The Intrepid Eye Society will present on the advancement of optometry covering topics related to future medical therapeutics/delivery platforms, diagnostics, collaborative care models, practice development and more.
- New Blue Light sessions present everything from the latest research findings to the basics of blue light—

both indoors and outside—and how to communicate this critical information and offer the best solutions to patients.

- The new Practice Owner & Manager Essentials program will focus on the business side of optometry for doctors and key decision makers, including strategies doctors need to grow business.
- The newly created, retail-focused Manager’s ‘To-Do-List’ mini-track features actionable takeaways attendees can immediately implement.

To learn more about Vision Expo, or to register, visit www.visionexpoeast.com. ■

The New York Expo Experience

NEW YORK—Vision Expo East organizers are emphasizing the New York “experience” at this month’s show and conference.

Exhibitors of eyewear and sunwear, spectacle and contact lenses, instruments and technology will share the spotlight with activities that underscore clinical and practical/business education in a range of programs, special sessions, Pop-Up Talks and networking events.

Vision Expo East will span the following sectors: Show Experience, Innovation, Technology and Fashion. ■



Vision Expo East Preview

Vision Monday and 20/20 Magazine to Host Intimate and Interactive Pop-Up Talks

NEW YORK—Attendees will have a free opportunity to engage and discuss relevant topics in a non-traditional, dynamic learning format with Pop-Up talks occurring at Vision Expo East.

Lounges will host talks on various topics, from eye-wear trends to information specifically for young professionals. The goal of these Pop-Up talks is to provide attendees with engaging and valuable experiences right on the show floor—all with the opportunity to network, interact and ask questions.

Vision Monday's associate editor **Jamie Wilson**, and assistant editor **Stephanie Sengwe** will host a Pop-Up talk on Friday, March 31 at 11 am in the Galleria Lounge titled **"Bricks & CLICK: Social Media Meets Optical on Main Street."** As independent ECPs emphasize service and choice as a competitive edge, they can also knit closer ties to their towns and local communities via social media.

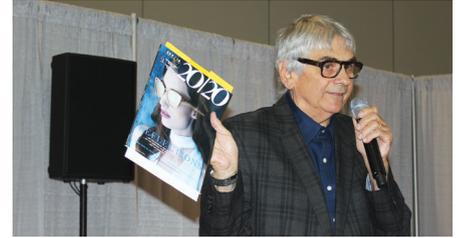
Don't miss out on hearing about some of the great ideas and tactics ECPs are using to do that today. Find out which efforts have attracted *Vision Monday's* attention and reflect both the rise of many consumers' desires to "Shop Local" and today's varied and valu-



Vision Monday's Mary Kane (l) and Jamie Wilson talked about independent ECPs and the "shop small" trend during the first ever pop-up talk for Vision Expo West 2016.

able social media interactions to build awareness and stronger customer connections.

20/20 Magazine's James J. Spina, VP/editor-in-chief along with his editorial team of **Christine Yeh**, executive editor; and **Victoria Garcia**, associate editor, and **Jillian Urceland**, assistant editor will present **"20/20 Soci-**



20/20 Magazine's James Spina educated the audience in the Galleria Lounge about how the publication spots trends, in his Pop-Up Talk titled "20/20's TrendSETTING—Don't Just Follow Fashion...Set It." Spina was able to get audience members to describe certain frames as if they were "selling" specific product to a customer and he gave out eyewear as a reward to ECPs for participating.

alEYEzing With Style" on Saturday, April 1 at 11 am in the Galleria Lounge.

If you are considering eyecare and eyewear as a serious business, this session will outline ways to reach your patient as a consumer eager for some style and fashion in their eyewear and sunwear. ■

20/20 Magazine's James Spina to Moderate 'Independent's Day' Panel

NEW YORK—Independent's Day: A Celebration of Independent Minded Vendors and Retailers, a panel moderated by James Spina, *20/20 Magazine's* editor-in-chief and senior VP, will take place on Saturday, April 1 at 5 pm in the Galleria Lounge.

This exclusive event, presented by *20/20 Magazine* and sponsored by Lafont, Morel and State Optical, will offer Expo attendees the opportunity to learn from a dynamic panel of suppliers and buyers representing the boutique and heritage eyewear category. Attendees will discover opportunities within these products and will learn about strategies for curating an independent branded inventory, pricing and positioning, as well as brand story telling sales tactics.

The panel will include both high end retailers and exhibitors from Vision Expo East. Spina said, "There seems to be such a buzz for the BIG news in op-

tical being the latest consolidation or the hottest fashion designer brand debut of late. The even bigger news is the intensely healthy and growing relationship between independent eyewear dispensers and retailers and the growing power of independent eyewear vendors dedicated to brands with a proud and totally eyewear related heritage.

"This scenario is unique to optical and in celebration of this honorable and growing enhanced vision. I'm honored to be hosting these factions as they detail their Declaration of Independence," Spina said.



James Spina.

Retailer panelists include:

- Edward Beiner, Purveyor of Fine Eyewear
- Jack Schaeffer, OD, Schaeffer Eye Centers
- Pierce Voorthuis, Georgetown Opticians

Exhibitor panelists include:

- Ray Khalil, Lafont
- Scott Shapiro, State Optical
- Tom Castiglione, Morel
- James Kisgen, Matsuda Eyewear

After the panel, the event continues with the opportunity to meet and mingle with the independent eyewear sponsors and peruse their collections at the VIP cocktail party from 5:45 to 6:30 pm. This event is by invitation only. ■

Building Awareness: Think About Your Eyes Increases Ad Investment

ALEXANDRIA, Va.—With a heftier budget, better media planning and a noteworthy track record of success, Think About Your Eyes has set new targets and moved swiftly to ensure that its 2017 efforts to raise awareness about the importance of eye exams will build upon the success of past years' campaigns.

Think About Your Eyes, which develops and manages the vision industry's national public awareness campaign, launched its 2017 national advertising campaign in mid-February. This year's campaign is getting a boost in advertising budget and updated placements that include several major network spots.

"2017 will be a momentous year for Think About Your Eyes," said Jon Torrey, executive director of the organization. "Thanks to support from new partners, and increased support from existing partners, we're able to continue to increase exams, improve the eye health of the American public and grow the industry."

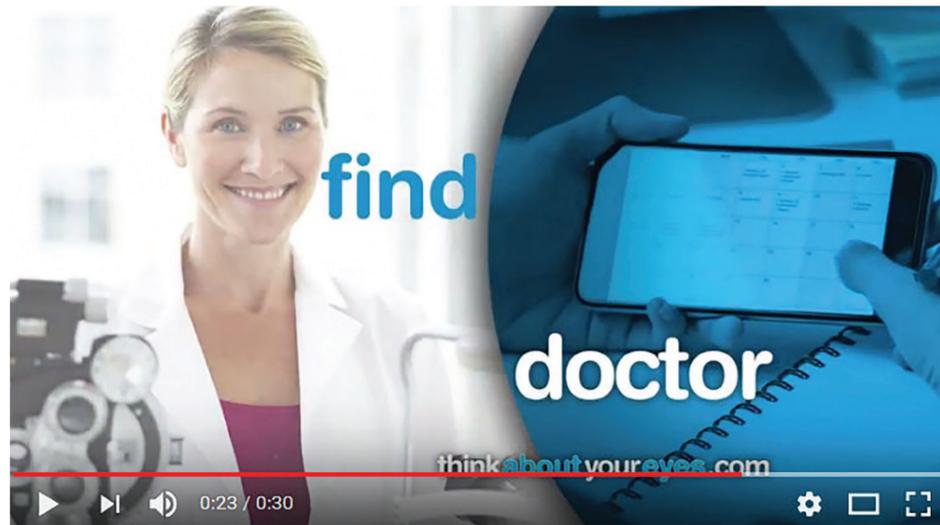
He added, "We want to educate the American public on the need for better eye and vision health. What's our flashpoint in that process? A comprehensive annual eye exam, that's the real driver."

Torrey participated in a roundtable discussion in late February about the Think About Your Eyes awareness campaign that was hosted by *Vision Monday* and its Jobson Healthcare Information "sister" publication *Review of Optometric Business*.

Roundtable participants in addition to Torrey included: Laurel O'Connor, Think About Your Eyes' marketing and communications manager; Ken Daniels, OD, with offices in Hopewell and Lambertville, N.J.; Gail Correale, OD, with offices in Westbury, N.Y.; and Brian O'Donnell, OD, with offices in Shavertown, Pa. Also participating were Jobson's Marge Axelrad, editor-in-chief of *Vision Monday*, and Roger Mummert, director of content for *Review of Optometric Business*.

Ads in the new campaign will run for three consecutive quarters in 2017, which is an increase compared with the two quarters the ads ran in previous years. Think About Your Eyes attributed the increase in air time, in part, to an increase in support from industry partners, including The Vision Council and the American Optometric Association (AOA).

In addition Johnson & Johnson Vision Care has signed on to the effort as a leadership partner. As a result, media spending has increased by 60 percent in 2017, according



Building Awareness: Think About Your Eyes Increases Advertising Investment

to a Think About Your Eyes announcement.

The broadcast ad portion of the campaign will appear in primetime across 27 cable networks, including such popular networks as USA, Comedy Central and FX. Also, for the first time ever in the awareness campaign, Think About Your Eyes ads will appear on broadcast networks, specifically ABC and NBC, during primetime programming and sporting events, including NBA and Major League Baseball games.

The schedule for the ads, which will be seen or heard through the end of September, include 15 million spots on podcasts and online audio (Pandora and Spotify), 14 million online video spots and 6 million digital banner ads across 2,000 top websites, including *The New York Times* and ESPN, according to Think About Your Eyes.

The expectation is that the boost in advertising will lead to a corresponding increase in eye exams.

In 2015, the most recent year for which data is available, Think About Your Eyes advertising (which was either seen or heard by consumers) prompted an incremental 828,463 eye exams, according to an analysis of the data from the campaign. This led to an additional 23 eye exams per practice across the U.S., according to Think About Your Eyes' analysis.

Overall, an additional 3.01 million people (who are described by Think About Your Eyes as "converts")

have responded that they have had an eye exam since seeing a Think About Your Eyes awareness ad. The ad campaign also has led to a shorter exam cycle (from 29 months to 16 months), led to a 29 percent increase in eyeglasses purchases and a 21 percent increase in purchase of contacts, and an incremental \$20 outlay for their eyeglass purchases.

Torrey also noted that, based on the respondent data that Think About Your Eyes has reviewed, the organization has taken steps to focus the campaign on key demographic groups in 2017.

For 2017, he said, one of the goals is to focus more on the 30- to 39-year-old segment of the population with children and with household income over \$50,000. "That is what we are calling our bullseye target, so we are buying specific media so we can get to those people with that 'Take care of yourself message,'" he explained during the roundtable.

"We still have a basic television buy that covers 25- to 49-year-olds, but we have a bullseye target and we are going to do a lot of digital [this year]," Torrey said.

"Education provided by Think About Your Eyes helps in that we are able to tell our patients how to prevent something, and that is phenomenal," Daniels said at the roundtable. "We try to let them know not to wait till they're a certain age to get tested. It's better to get eye

exams earlier so they can prevent a disease."

Correale, a Westbury optometrist, agreed that population groups need different marketing approaches. "I try to approach each generation differently," she explained. "A more mature audience responds to TV and Millennials are more responsive to social media.

"Think About Your Eyes helps in that it protects the integrity of the profession. The return on investment in working with Think About Your Eyes is bigger than any [advertising] you can place," she added.

O'Donnell said one aspect of the Think About Your Eyes campaign that he finds beneficial is the approach the ads take toward mothers. "Moms make a lot of the health care decisions for children," he said.

He also noted that the Think About Your Eyes website plays an important role in driving office visits and providing education to consumers about eye health. "It's very navigable and educational, particularly as it relates to children's vision," he said.

In addition, Think About Your Eyes noted that the

awareness campaign has achieved an important milestone: 3 million visitors to the campaign website (ThinkAboutYourEyes.com) since its launch. The site features a comprehensive practice locator tool that enables visitors to easily search for and find local eyecare providers from a database that now houses more than 19,000 participating providers.

Optical industry companies that have current partnerships in place with TAYE are: Alcon, The Vision Council, American Optometric Association (AOA), All About Vision, Gunnar Optiks, Jobson Optical Group, National Vision Inc. (NVI), SpecialEyes, SPY, Hilco, Walman Optical, Transitions Optical, Shamir, Chemistrie Eyewear, Essilor, Luxottica Group, Eschenbach, Johnson & Johnson Vision Care,

First Vision Media Group, International Vision Expo and WestGroupe.

Think About Your Eyes is a national public awareness initiative in partnership with the American Optometric Association (AOA), focused on educating consumers about the importance of vision health and annual comprehensive eye exams. ■



Roundtable participants included (l to r) Think About Your Eyes' Jon Torrey and Laurel O'Connor; Brian O'Donnell, OD; Ken Daniels, OD; and Gail Correale, OD.

Vision Expo East Preview

New Eyes Rockers to Return to Hard Rock Café

NEW YORK—Optical industry singers and musicians are picking their songs, warming up their voices and tuning up their instruments for the fourth annual fundraising concert, Rockin' for New Eyes, at the Hard Rock Café on April 1. The show, featuring industry stalwarts as well as optometric students, will again benefit New Eyes for the Needy's prescription eyeglass program for children and adults in need in the U.S.

"April 1 marks the first day of our 85th Anniversary year, and we're thrilled to kick it off with Rockin' for New Eyes," said Jean Gajano, executive director of New Eyes for the Needy. "We're looking forward to a fun and exciting night with some great surprises for the audience."

While musical preparations are underway, sponsors are lining up early for Rockin' for New Eyes. National Vision, Inc. (NVI) is returning as lead sponsor and is joined by Aspex Eyewear, Avesis, Charmant, ClearVision Optical, Davis Vision, DeRigo REM, Essilor and KBco, Eyewear by R.O.I., Eyewear Designs Ltd., Inspecs USA, Jobson Optical Group, Kenmark Eyewear, Marco Ophthalmic, McGee Group, McQ, Modo Eyewear, Nouveau Eyewear, Ocuco, Patch, Spectera, Transitions Optical, Valley Contax, Vision Council/Reed Exhibitions and Zyloware.

"New Eyes is grateful for the outstanding support of the optical industry," said Gajano. "Our performers and sponsors have made Rockin' for New Eyes the must-go-to event during Vision Expo East week and their generosity has helped thousands of impoverished U.S. residents build new lives through clear vision."

Rockin' for New Eyes attracts a broad audience from within the optical industry, including many young optometrists who are the guests of National Vision.

"National Vision is happy to bring 250 of our next generation optometrists to both a pre-party and then to celebrate our industry at this year's Rockin' For New Eyes event at the Hard Rock Café on Saturday night," said Bob Stein, National Vision's chief philanthropic and managed care development officer.

"The students bring an incredible energy to the event and get to watch a great night of music, meet and bond with our great industry professionals, and close out the night with the Student Optometrist Band. The optometry students have become an integral in-



Producer Craig Sasson, above.

redient at what will be another great show, and we look forward to entertaining them again. Make sure you make it to this year's Rockin' For New Eyes Event, and spend some time getting to know the future doctors of our profession," he said.

A new addition to this year's show is producer Craig Sasson. Director of a School of Rock in New Jersey, Sasson is a progressive instrumentalist and seasoned guitarist with a passion for teaching, and a songwriter spanning across the hard rock, blues and funk genres. A high-energy bandleader with a performance career that spans two decades, Sasson has performed at the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame and at Irving Plaza for Fuse TV.

"When I first spoke to Jean Gajano and learned about New Eyes for The Needy, I was immediately interested in helping out," Sasson told Vision Monday. "This charity is truly amazing as are the people involved. I am thrilled to be working with all of the bands and antici-



Gary Gerber, OD, (l) and Dana Cohen rock the house at last year's show. They will join the band again for this year's show.

pate the best event yet."

New Eyes for the Needy, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, was founded in 1932 and remains driven by its original and timeless mission of providing eyeglasses to individuals in financial need.

In celebration of its 85th anniversary, New Eyes is launching its 20/20 for 2020 project, seeking to raise \$1 million for new prescription eyeglasses for disadvantaged children and adults in the U.S. and to collect one million gently used glasses for distribution to the poor in developing countries.

Proceeds raised through Rockin' for New Eyes will be directed toward the 20/20 for 2020 campaign.

Rockin' for New Eyes will take place at the Hard Rock

Café New York in Times Square on Saturday, April 1 from 8:30 pm to 12:30 am. To purchase tickets go to www.new-eyes.org. ■

