

New Ideas to Elevate the Patient Experience

Digital Tools Help ECPs Reimagine Service and Care

Image Credits: Getty Images / Martinns



BY VM STAFF

NEW YORK—Digital technologies and access to business of all types, and health care in particular, have been on the rise for the past 18 months as the pandemic has transformed people's work and personal lives. As a result, patient receptivity to digital tools, which can make their interactions with business more convenient and streamlined, have gained a lot of traction.

Among eyecare professionals and optical retailers, too, these new expectations among patients have sped up the adoption of new behaviors and new definitions of what comprises a next-level patient experience—on the eyecare and eyewear side of the business.

Now more than ever, this new dynamic is creating more opportunities for ECPs to consider a “hybrid” approach, blending the features and benefits of new systems, services and technologies with the in-person, hands-on direct care in their optical and in their exam lanes.

VM continues to see this embrace of both real-life “brick” with online “click” as a megatrend. We continue to report on and examine new types of digital tech being adopted—at a faster and wider pace—by optical retailers and independent ECPs as well.

Consumer and patient attitudes about technology in health care delivery and in access to services and related products have become much more open. And the ECPs that VM speaks to in this special feature also report that they and their associates are growing increasingly comfortable with bringing these new tools into their practices and demonstrating to patients that they are leaning more into such modern ideas.

On the following pages are examples of just a few of the tools and software services that are creating efficiencies, streamlining processes, adding to the bottom line and growing independent and regional groups' profiles with patients today. ■

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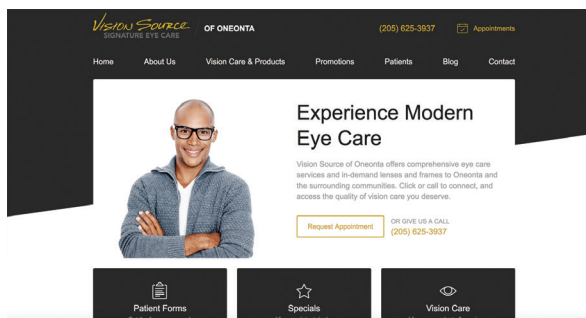


ECPs Find Benefits in Adopting New Digital Tools to Extend Connections With Patients

BY VM STAFF

ONEONTA, Ala. And GREENSBORO, N.C.—Many independent practices are seeing the advantage of using new digital tools to extend their connections with patients, tools that help patients book appointments at their convenience, discover suggestions via more productive e-mail communications that help inform patients about potential choices and enliven the dispensing experience as well.

That's true for ECPs who are taking part with EssilorLuxottica either as Essilor Experts and as participants in the newer EssilorLuxottica 360 program which gives them and their practice teams access to a suite of new digital enhancements. The EssilorLuxottica tools range from digital targeting of consumers in close proximity to practices and the tools that change the experience when the patient arrives at the practice.



Rainbow City Family Eyecare (<https://vision-source-vsoneonta.com/>) practices are based in Oneonta, Ala., and Dr. Gene Harrison has served on the board of the Alabama Optometric Association and is currently the state administrator for Vision Source. He said, "The SmartBook online appointment scheduling has everything we need. Patients can go online to schedule their appointments but we can also enhance this capability to more patients by delivering messages about exams that might be overdue and other informational messages, like our new dry eye therapies and the benefits providing early detection for macular degeneration

through Adapt Tx and other services. We are probably seeing an additional 5 to 10 patients a week due to this."

The program, he said, "gives us access to social media content that's helps us generate more consistent social posts about our services and we've seen the impact already."

Coming onstream at Rainbow Family Eye Care soon will be one of the new digital monitors that the practice will set up in its dispensaries to help showcase more information about the eyewear brands carried. "We think this will have a big impact as these communicate a modern image for our practice to patients."

For Dr. Tim Koop of Triad Eye Associates (<https://visionsource-eyecenterofthetriad.com/>) in Greensboro, the advantages connecting the SmartBook online appointment scheduling to Essilor's hyper

local marketing program helps create a smoother way for patients to set up their time and/or discover Triad, also a Vision Source practice.

Dr. Koop told VM, "The hyperlocal marketing gets us located in the search for business ads, which is connected with SmartBook so patients can click right away to make their ap-

pointment which is one less barrier for them. It's a seamless experience which is good for them and for us. We've been seeing about 4 or 5 new patients a week from SmartBook, which we started around January of this year. We also added a new associate to our team last fall and this helped us right away to get her appointments booked."

The Triad practice has had an established office in Greensboro for 18 years, which brings an eclectic mix of patients and demographics, Dr Koop said. The other office, Oak Ridge, about 20 miles away, is more of a bedroom community for Greensboro. It is slightly more affluent with many people working



from home so they are online a lot.

"They see ads, whether on TV or on their social feeds, which can take them to the Essilor Experts page, and also connect them to us. It's a nice advantage." Dr. Koop anticipates bringing in a digital screen from Luxottica to play some brand and marketing videos, too, in the dispensary. "This is



another touchpoint with patients and it will make an impact."

He added, "I'd been intending to bring in more tools for a while, researching things a bit pre-pandemic. We were initially nervous about trying some of the new tools and losing a bit of control with the appointments, but skipping ahead, this has turned out to help our staff a lot. For now, we also have taken to creating welcome videos for new patients to familiarize them with their doctor and team before they come in. Today, you really need to meet patients where they are," Dr. Koop said. ■

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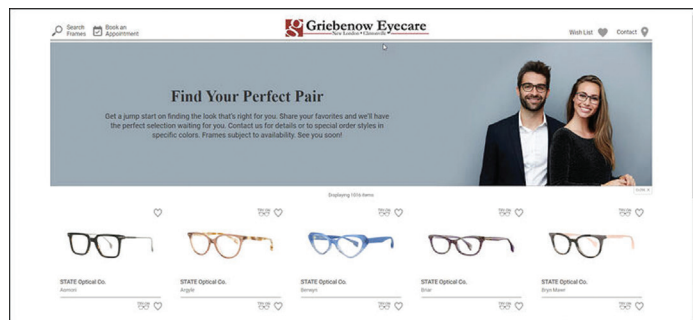
Wisconsin's Griebenow Eyecare Learns to Capture Patients' Interest With My Frame Gallery

BY VM STAFF

NEW YORK—Can “remote” coexist with “connected?” Many eyecare professionals are finding that there is not as much distance between an online presence and an in-store bond as once was perceived to be the case. The pandemic has enabled consumers as well as ECPs to rethink the role digital outreach can play.

As writer Preston Fassel reports in the Frames Data blog this month, “Griebenow Eyecare in Wisconsin uses My Frame Gallery to successfully compete with bigger practices and online retailers, after initially using it to stay open during COVID.”

“We see about 12,500 patients a year,” said Melissa Sylte, the business manager for the two-location practice, which was especially threatened by the pandemic due to their size, number of employees, and longevity in the local community. “It’s a two-clinic practice with two doctors, we have about 18 employees and Griebenow Eyecare has been in business since 1979.”



When both locations were forced to temporarily close at the height of the pandemic, Sylte got together with her team to strategize how they were going to navigate the strange new world of 2020. The first thing on their list? Implementing a new piece of technology they’d been considering but hadn’t gotten around to yet: My Frame Gallery.

“We launched it in May 2020,” said Sylte. “Our office was closed like many other practices were

and we saw it as a good opportunity to talk about all of the electronic and technological services we already had on our to-do list. We found that it was the right time to make use of the time that was given to us in an unfortunate way and do something with it.

“That’s when we started exploring My Frame Gallery and digitizing all our applications. We launched a new website at the same time, so we launched it all together.”

To make sure that the launch was as successful as it could be, Sylte strategized a complex rollout plan built around their automated messaging system.

“We built content into the messaging system to say, ‘Try glasses on from your couch!’” The practice also implemented their website as well as a coordinated social media campaign: “We put a button on our website that said, ‘Try eyeglasses on from your

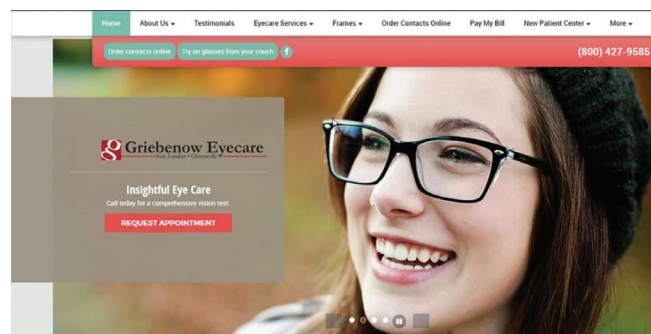
couch!’ Then we did a promotion to kick it all off and advertised it on our Facebook page.

“Those automated messages really helped in getting click-throughs from customers. Especially when they’re getting a reminder, and then it says, ‘While you’re waiting, you can click here and check out some frames in advance! As it turned out, the

rollout was a major success.

“That helped get people’s interest... we had people coming in knowing what they wanted, which is always key, pandemic or no pandemic. You always want your patients to already have an idea of what they’re looking for because it speeds up the process for both the patient and the optician.”

When patients began coming back to the dispensary, the response was palpable.



“It definitely had an impact, and actually the Frames Data folks gave me some numbers a while back about how many people were looking at My Frame Gallery. I was blown away. I didn’t realize that many people were looking at it, but now I know patients are really using it, and some of them are looking at it to decide if they want to come to us for an exam or they’re using it as they are shopping around while they’re thinking about their eye exam,” Sylte said.

“Warby Parker has their commercial out ‘You can try on frames on your phone now!’ Now I get to tell my patients, through our Facebook page and online advertising, you can try on your glasses online from our little shop. It’s helpful to compete with online retailers.

“All patients are already looking online. Every private practice already knows that if they’re going to any continuing education conferences. They know people are shopping online. My Frame Gallery allows us to build our online platform and provides us a way of featuring our frames online, too.”

Sylte said My Frame Gallery allows the practice to help form more of a sense of connection between patients and their frames, making them seem like more of an investment and a part of their identity.

Read more about Griebenow’s experience along with more tips and learnings from other ECPs who are using My Frame Gallery. These are posted on the Frames Data blog at <https://blog.framesdata.com/>. ■

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Patients Appreciate the Precise Fit and Ease of Selection Provided by Zeiss Technology

BY ANDREW KARP / GROUP EDITOR, LENSES & TECHNOLOGY

BOERNE, Texas—Two years ago, Eyes on Main in Boerne, Texas, became one of the first Zeiss customers in the U.S. to get a Visufit 1000, the company's advanced measuring and dispensing system. Although the technology was new to Eyes on Main, practice owner Loren Rodgers, OD, an ocular disease, vision rehabilitation low vision specialist, was confident she had made a good investment. "We were utilizing the Zeiss iTerminal Mobile, which is another outstanding measuring device, but after previewing the Visufit 1000 we knew it would be a wonderful asset to the practice."

A digital platform that combines 3D centration with virtual frame try-on, the Visufit 1000 is designed for ease of use with a computer or an iPad 6. Patient measurement is performed without the need of a clip-frame. 3D centration is achieved with nine mutually calibrated cameras that capture a 180-degree view of the patient's face in a single shot without the need of a clip frame. The measurement data are processed using 45 million reference points, ensuring extremely precise capture of measurement data for the frame, the eye, the pupil and the cornea, a feature Dr. Rodgers especially values.

"With today's staff turnover, the Visufit 1000 produces a more accurate measurement with very little training time and staff time in taking the measurements," she said. "The Visufit 1000 has some very sensitive colored-light indicators that ensure the patient is in the correct location and in their most natural position. The program also allows the optician to see if the patient is lining up correctly with the additional markings in the program."

The Visufit 1000 can determine back vertex distance for both right and left sides. A 3D digital reconstruction of the face can be created and enables the back vertex distance to be captured, even with frames featuring very thick temples. These personalized measurements ensure that patients at Eyes on Main get a perfect fit.



Loren Rodgers, OD, owner of Eyes on Main in Boerne, Texas, said the Zeiss Visufit 1000, pictured behind her, is "a wonderful asset to the practice."

"After the measurements are taken, the Visufit 1000 allows me and our optical manager to review each and every measurement before it is submitted to the lab," explained Dr. Rodgers. "The system helps us with dispensing the eyewear and troubleshooting any issues. If the patient is not wearing the glasses the same way they were during the measurements, we are able to see the difference and readjust the eyewear to be worn the way they were at the time of measurements."

Because the Visufit 1000 can provide such precise, personalized measurements, Eyes on Main lab redo orders are below average. "We provide the patients with Zeiss Smartlife Individual and Zeiss Smartlife Superb progressive lenses," said Dr. Rodgers.

"These lenses are fully customizable with the Zeiss lab when the correct measurements are given. The Visufit 1000 gives us all the measurements the lab needs to fully customize the lenses. The lab does not have to use the default measurements. Furthermore, Zeiss has a feature called "frame fit" which assures the measurements are further customized to the fit of the frame. This additional measurement is provided with the Visufit 1000."

A virtual try-on module allows patients to explore catalogues of virtual frames. The system can create a 3D patient avatar for trying out frames, allowing

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- Loren Rodgers, OD, owner, Eyes on Main

them to try on and compare frames in-store or use their digital twin to try on frames from an online catalogue. The virtual try-on module uses an artificial intelligence algorithm to learn from patient interactions. It analyses face shape, skin, eye and hair color to help dispensers suggest frames which best suit their patient.

"The system assists us with helping the patient in selecting the perfect eyewear," Dr. Rodgers said. "When the patient is undecided with which eyewear they prefer, we use the frame selection feature which allows the patient to see themselves in 3D form and compare multiple pairs of eyewear side by side."

"This feature always helps the patient in making a decision on which eyewear they prefer. After the patient makes their selection, we do not have to retake the photo for the measurement. We are capable of utilizing that photo which has captured the measurements."

Eyes on Main patients have become fans of the Visufit 1000 and the enhanced dispensing and fitting experience it offers them. "Even without any experience in optics, they can see the accuracy of the Visufit 1000," said Dr. Rodgers. "The comments we hear the most are 'we have never experienced measurements like this.' They're excited about their new eyewear." ■

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Now Optics Utilizes 'Buy Now, Pay Later' Tech From Sunbit to 'Make Eyecare Easier'

BY MARK TOSH / SENIOR EDITOR

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.—Now Optics, the parent company of My Eyelab and Stanton Optical, is moving into the fast-growing and popular “buy now, pay later” (BNPL) segment with its latest technology upgrade. The company established, as of this fall, a new partnership with Sunbit, a leading BNPL technology service provider.

The partnership will integrate Sunbit's BNPL technology into the company's My Eyelab and Stanton Optical retail locations to provide customers with flexible payment options, which the company said will make Now Optics' mission to make affordable, accessible and efficient eyecare for its patients even easier.

“We're always thinking about new and innovative ways we can deliver simple, affordable eyecare at My Eyelab and Stanton Optical, and our latest partnership with Sunbit takes that commitment a step further,” Daniel Stanton, chief executive officer of Now Optics, said.

He added, “Eyecare is a right, not a privilege, so we feel obligated to provide as much flexibility as possible with payment options for each and every person that comes to our stores.”

As of the end of September, Now Optics had 234 locations across its My Eyelab and Stanton Optical portfolios. Among these locations, 167 are corporate-owned and 67 are operated by franchisees, a spokesman told *Vision Monday*.

Sunbit's BNPL payment options are currently available at a majority of locations, and will be fully available at all Now Optics' stores by Nov. 10. Sunbit technology is offered in-store and online through nearly 8,000 locations, including auto dealership service centers, optical practices, dentist offices and specialty health care services.

Sunbit's BNPL solution approves 90 percent of people who apply and provides them with a three-month, no-interest financing option. To ensure flexibility and accessibility for all, six-month



The “buy-now pay-later” technology from Sunbit will be available at Now Optics' 234 locations (both My Eyelab and Stanton Optical) by mid-November.

and 12-month BNPL options with interest are also available.

According to Stanton, Now Optics is always looking for “new and innovative ways to help more people see better and allow patients to obtain the eyecare they need to support their overall eye health in a way that meets their budget.”

He noted that by partnering with a BNPL option like Sunbit, which is easy to use and transparent to the customers, it provides patients the ability to obtain everything necessary to take care of their eye health. “Customers have been excited to see how they can provide eyecare for themselves and their family in a budget conscious way and have been loving this flexibility,” he added.

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In addition, the debut of Sunbit's BNPL technology in Now Optics' stores marks another technological milestone for the company, following its early adoption of optical telehealth. As of September, the company had conducted more than 1.6 million telehealth eye exams.

My Eyelab and Stanton Optical locations feature an assortment of over 2,000 frames and top contact lens brands to fit both style and budgets and to allow consumers freedom to experiment with unique, stylish designs that fit their personal style.

The company continues to expand its retail footprint with its store base of more than 230 locations in 28 states. ■