

In the Groove? How
to Dial in Patient Flow

5 Qs with Eyemart
Express' Paula Blomquist

Biochemist, pharmacist,
optometrist? Yes, she is.

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Optometry TODAY!

BEST PRACTICES FOR TODAY'S
CORPORATE EYECARE PROFESSIONAL

JANUARY
2020



THE 2020 RETAIL SURVIVAL GUIDE

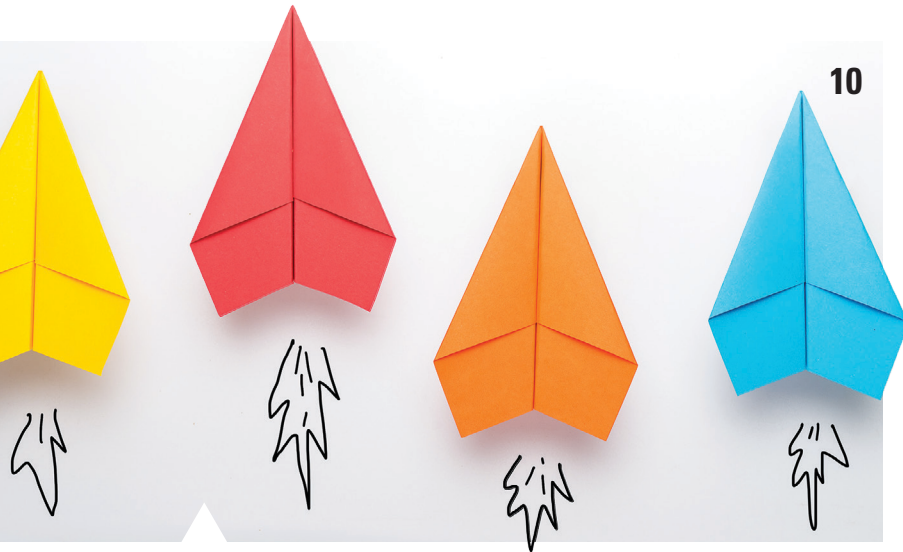
4 must-read ways to prep
your practice—and your
career—for the turbulent
optical retail landscape

{ Who will win the
optical retail race? }

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2020 Retail Survival

Who will win the optical retail race? The businesses that have the vision to adapt, change, and deliver cutting-edge tech will undoubtedly rise to the top.

The optical arena has an ever-expanding number of players, from independent practices and private equity-funded groups to online sellers and corporate opticals. As the market becomes more crowded, competition becomes more intense for all those involved on the playing field.

“I finally added a retinal camera this year and the results have been amazing. Only wish I had done it sooner.”

—Jeremy Ernstes, O.D., Walmart leaseholder in Tampa, FL, tells us in this issue's *The 2020 Retail Survival Guide* feature

How is a corporate optometrist—who may be a contract or even employed O.D.—to define their practice today to remain viable and thrive in the marketplace in their own community?

In our cover feature in this issue—**The 2020 Retail Survival Guide** starting on **page 10**—we address this question by providing four smart, tested solutions. *COT!*'s contributing writer Maria Sampalis, O.D., catches up with two successful corporate optometrists—from a Walmart sublease holder to an owner of a practice located next to a Walmart Vision Center—to reveal just how they are prepping their business for a highly competitive future.



One Tip: Equip your office with new technology to provide higher-quality eye exams and define your business as a high-tech place of business.

Want more competitive intel? Also in this issue, *COT!*'s **New Grad** column on **page 6** delivers a competitive edge with four hands-on ways corporate locations efficiently handle high patient volume. On **page 8** in our **Business Insider** column, six retail experts (from Luxottica Eye Care's senior director of O.D. engagement to Walmart's regional talent specialist) divulge the state of corporate optometry today—plus its outlook for the future.

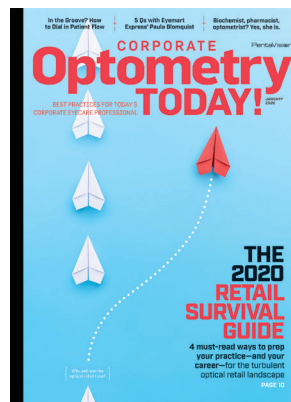
There's also much, much more in this content-packed issue of *COT!* On **page 16**, check out our inspiring interview with one corporate O.D. who is a biochemist, pharmacist—and optometrist.

We hope you enjoy the issue!

P.S. Want more? **Check out our Facebook page: @CorporateOptometryToday!**

Erinn Morgan

Editor-in-Chief + Editorial Director
Corporate Optometry Today! + *Eyecare Business*



In this content-packed issue of *COT!*, corporate O.D.s divulge 4 must-read ways to prep for the turbulent optical retail landscape.

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TREND TRACKER

COT! PINPOINTS THE KEY TRENDS OF INTEREST FOR CORPORATE OPTOMETRISTS



MYOPIA MOVEMENT

CooperVision recently released findings from a newly commissioned Harris Survey of U.S. parents and eyecare professionals about myopia, hosting a corresponding myopia-focused panel with the mission to #ProtectKidsVision.

- Here, we share some key insights *COT!* caught from the panel:
- One in 4 children in the U.S. is myopic, but according to the survey results, only 33% of parents know what that term means, or how it can affect their child's future eyesight.
 - Two-thirds of ECPs (66%) have seen an increase in the prevalence of pediatric myopia in their practice over the last five to 10 years. This aligns with data from the American Optometric Association showing myopia has become increasingly prevalent in the U.S., with an increase of 25% in the past 40 years.
 - Parents say they are more knowledgeable about other childhood conditions including the flu (93%), ear infections (86%), and lice (80%) compared with their knowledge of myopia (65%). —*K.A.R.*

EYE ON DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

You already know to keep tabs on digital transformations for your own business, but which technologies are trending for 2020? *Forbes* shares five digital transformation trends rocking the retail space in the new year.



- 1. Augmented Reality:** AR helps consumers feel confident in their purchases. Virtual eyewear try-on, anyone?
- 2. Now, Now, Now:** In the age of Amazon, shoppers want their products fast. In fact, 88% of consumers are willing to pay for same-day (or faster) shipping, according to research from PwC.
- 3. Easy + Personal:** Smart retailers will utilize social media, AI, and more to make sure that each customer's shopping experience is streamlined and personalized.
- 4. Social Shopping:** Social shopping is already in high gear on Instagram and Pinterest, but the phenomenon will further integrate itself into the retail space (both online and in-store) in the new year.
- 5. A Mix of Reality + Virtual:** "I'm not just talking about virtual changing rooms," shares Daniel Newman for *Forbes*. "I'm talking about users being able to place themselves in their favorite brands' advertisements, being able to model their favorite brands' clothing, and an increasing coordination of virtual experiences that will intertwine on the spatial web." —*K.A.R.*

SPEC-TACULAR STUDENTS

Italian eyewear manufacturer Thema Optical is partnering with Miami Dade College and its Vision Care Technology and Opticianry program, inviting students to Thema's Miami factory to give them a behind-the-scenes look at the manufacturing of customizable eyewear, plus how frames are made with the company's patented 3D Acetate Technology.

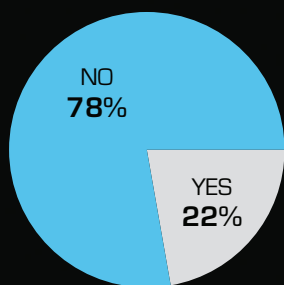


Jacopo Umattino (left), Thema's production manager, working with Miami Dade students.

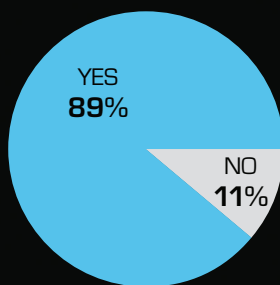
"The future of the optical industry is bright, and it is because of programs like this," says Giulia Valmassoi, CEO of Thema Optical's North American branch. —*Kerri Ann Raimo*

A RECENT STUDY OF 265 LARGE RETAILER PATIENTS SHOWS:

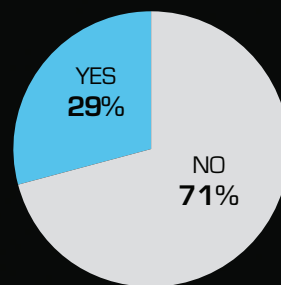
Do you like the "Puff Test"?



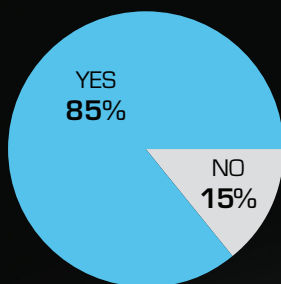
Is the new test more comfortable than the "Puff Test"?



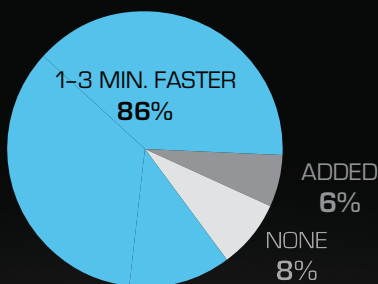
Would you visit the eye doctor sooner if you did not have the "Puff Test"?



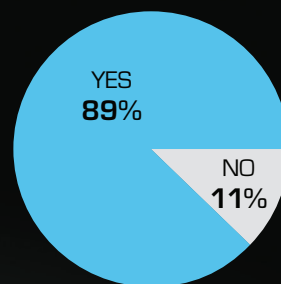
Would you return/recommend this retailer to your friends or family because of the new "NO PUFF" test?



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TECHNICIAN RESPONSE
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Controlling the Flow

4 hands-on ways
corporate locations
efficiently handle
high patient
volume

ARE YOU A NEW GRAD CONCERNED about handling the patient volume in a busy corporate optical location?

The benefits of working in corporate optometry are many—including the opportunity to hone clinical skills with a consistent flow of patients. But, being a new grad in a fast-paced environment can require some time to adjust. Organizing patient flow and maximizing efficiency, especially in busy locations, is essential.

Here, we present four ways that corporate opticals—and the new optometrists working within them—can make the patient volume easier to handle.

#1

CROSS-TRAIN STAFF.

The optical staff can be cross-trained to make the patient experience frictionless. How? The associates are often trained to assist with the high volume of patients by helping with the transition of a walk-in patient, verifying insurance/

copays, pretesting, and performing other tasks.

Cross-trained staff understand the various aspects of the business and can wear multiple hats when things get busy or during staff shortages.

#2

PRACTICE EFFICIENCY.

The efficiency of the practice is vital to the success of a corporate optical. The foot traffic seen by so many of these locations requires it.

Many store layouts are strategically designed to be able to handle four or five patients an hour. Aiding the efficiency is the fact that many corporate opticals will have a tech on staff to pretest and handle all major testing so that the O.D. can focus on what they need to do.

Verification of insurance benefits is usually pulled ahead of the appointment time to help reduce time spent at check-in and to prevent bottlenecks in the schedule.

#3

EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY.

Many corporate opticals have installed the most up-to-date technology available in the industry, and that is extremely helpful in handling a heavy patient volume.

Automated exam lanes help reduce the need for double entry and can increase the accuracy of an eye exam. Retinal imaging is also a great way to help educate the patient about their eye health, document any findings, and move the exam along quickly.

#4

EMR IS YOUR FRIEND.

Efficient operations and good patient flow are dependent on reducing schedule lags and increasing the speed of the patient journey. Many corporate opticals use automated recall technology or services to help fill the patient schedule and reduce no-show rates, which saves



CROSS-TRAINING SMARTS.

Cross-trained staff understand the various aspects of the business and can wear multiple hats when things get busy or during staff shortages.”



EMR EFFECTIVENESS.

EMR systems let staff quickly search for and produce patient charts—ultimately increasing the efficiency of the eye exam as it will be easier for the O.D. to search past records and input new findings.”

the staff from making phone calls.

EMR systems let staff quickly search for and produce patient charts—ultimately increasing the efficiency of the

eye exam as it will be easier for the optometrist to search past records and input new findings.

When it comes to practice efficiency and handling a high volume of patients, corporate optometry has it figured out. Many new graduates join corporate optometry so they can learn the basics of running a practice in addition to honing their patient skills.

New grad and still concerned about handling notable patient volume? Go with the flow, and learn from your corporate location the ins and outs of patient flow, staff training, efficient store design, and the equipment needed to maintain a fast-paced yet efficient schedule. **COT!** —*Maria Sampalis, O.D.*

6 BIG IDEAS

A half-dozen retail experts divulge the state of corporate optometry today + the outlook for the future

A GROUP OF SIX CORPORATE OPTOMETRY

retail experts gathered at Vision Expo West 2019 for a panel discussion focusing on the forces that shaped corporate optometry in 2019, as well as goals for 2020.

Here, ahead of the corporate optometry event at Vision Expo East, we share insightful bits from the latest discussion.

WESLIE HAMADA, O.D.

LUXOTTICA EYE CARE'S SENIOR DIRECTOR OF O.D. ENGAGEMENT

"We're looking at ways that we really can make sure we continue to engage and bring together the doctors...We want to make sure that our doctors don't feel alone—that they always have someone either within their community or that they can connect with online."

BILL WERNER, O.D.

NATIONAL VISION'S DIRECTOR OF STUDENT RELATIONS

"Starting in January 2020, we're going to start a new onboarding program for our new graduates where they will have additional mentorship, training, and communication."

ALLISON BREWER JONES, O.D.

WALMART'S REGIONAL TALENT SPECIALIST

"We grand-opened [in mid-September] our very first Walmart Health. In that facility, the focus on accessibility to health care is very important to our consumers and patients...Tying optometry into that is very important, and us being a member of that community health care space."

BEN CHUDNER, O.D.

ACUITY EYECARE GROUP'S CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

"What you're going to see from Acuity Eyecare Group is better efforts on integration into our systems, making sure that they're up and running with our point-of-sale system and our electronic health records, to allow us better access to see how the doctors are managing patients and allow them to make better decisions to help their patients."

ERIC SCHMIDT, O.D.

FOUNDING PARTNER OF KEPLR VISION

"How we feel we can really grow and become better is by bringing in new doctors, creating new opportunities for doctors not in our practice yet, and also by expanding the opportunities of our existing doctors."

MAURICE WILSON, O.D.

PRESIDENT-ELECT AT ENERGYES—
THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF CORPORATE OPTOMETRISTS

"One of our goals has been to create a community for corporate optometry across all brands. We're learning more and more about how to create this community, and we truly feel that you can't just have an online community. We need face-to-face meetings and times and real conversations with people among all brands, among all members." **COT!**

—*Kerri Ann Raimo*

MORE ONLINE!

To view the full panel discussion, head to our Facebook Live post: bit.ly/VEWpanel.



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The 2020 Retail Survival Guide

Expert O.D.s weigh in on how to prep your practice for changes in the eyecare landscape—from focusing on new technologies to mapping out an exit strategy

BY MARIA SAMPALIS, O.D.

Who will win the optical retail race? Those businesses that adapt, change, and deliver cutting-edge tech will certainly rise to the top.



“I finally added a retinal camera this year, and the results have been amazing. Only wish I had done it sooner.”

—JEREMY ERNSTES, O.D.,
Walmart leaseholder in Tampa, FL



In today's optical retail world, competition is fierce.

The ever-expanding number of players—from corporate opticals and private equity firms to independent practices and online innovators like Warby Parker (which recently announced its own new low-cost contact lens brand)—are slicing the pie in entirely new ways.

For corporate optometrists, even as optical chains continue to expand their reach and store count across the country, optical retail's increasing competition has set the stage for O.D.s and their need to define—or refine—their own approach to practice growth.

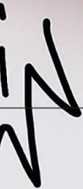
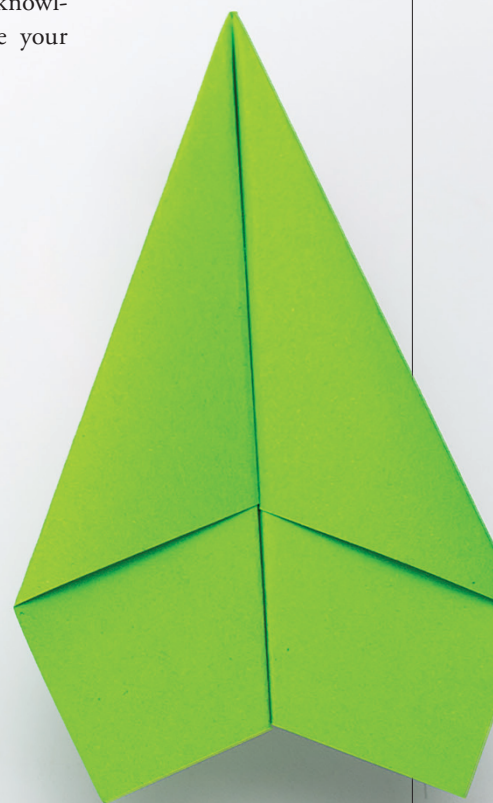
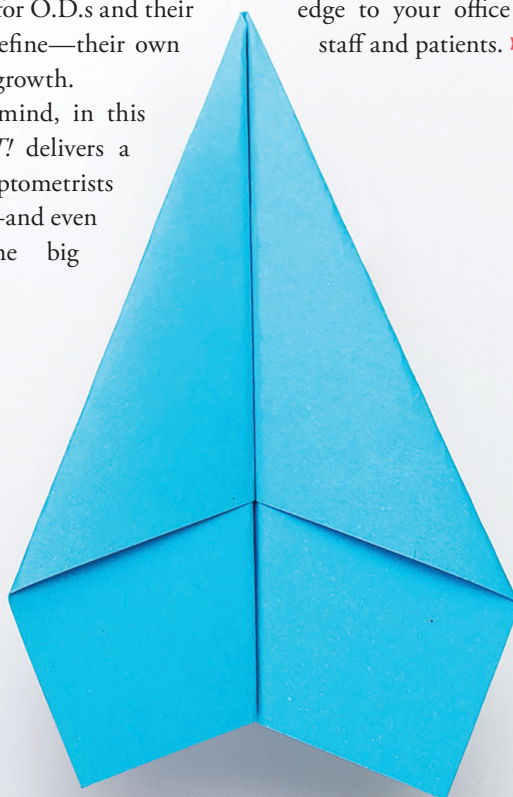
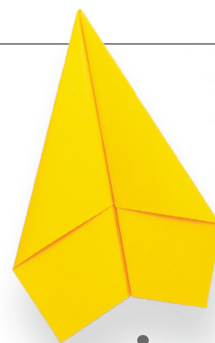
With all this in mind, in this special feature, *COT!* delivers a blueprint of what optometrists can do to help meet—and even capitalize upon—the big

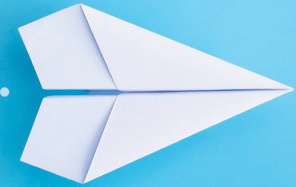
and constant changes taking place in the eyecare landscape today. Here, four ways to survive—and thrive.

1. PROMOTE YOUR MEDICAL EDGE.

The medical model has become the main mode of practice for many corporate O.D.s as they adapt to the industry changes. To start promoting the medical model in your office, help your patients understand that an eye exam is more than just a prescription for glasses.

To further adapt to change—and keep your clinical knowledge on the cutting edge—stay up to date through continuing education. Bring that knowledge to your office to educate your staff and patients. »





2. GEAR UP WITH TECH.

Equip your office with new technology to help retain your patients and provide higher-quality eye exams.

As technology becomes mainstream, you do not want to be the office that is left behind as patients accept tech as commonplace in the exam. Promoting eye health through technology adds the “wow factor” for patients. It will keep patients coming back to your office or entice them to follow you wherever you may go throughout your career.



Jeremy Ernstes, O.D.

Walmart leaseholder
Tampa, FL

● “I finally added a retinal camera this year, and the results have been amazing. Only wish I had done it sooner.”

—Jeremy Ernstes, O.D., a Walmart leaseholder in Tampa, FL

3. SEIZE OPPORTUNITY.

Corporate optometry has many opportunities. In today’s business climate, being able to adapt, pivot, and change can help guide you to opportunities that are out there.

Find which corporate optical brands best align with your vision of your future.

Many companies are looking to expand and open new locations, and being flexible and nimble is key to success in today’s retail world.

● “When my corporate optical location closed, I decided it was time to start my own private practice, Sampalis Eye Care, and it was a great decision.

“At the same time, I also took on fill-in work with For Eyes. I developed a great relationship with the organization, and we ended up opening a new location together. The balance between the two practices has been perfect.”

—Maria Sampalis, O.D., owner of Sampalis Eye Care in Cranston, RI, and sublease at For Eyes by Grand Vision in Rhode Island

4. MAP AN EXIT STRATEGY.

If all else fails—and you are concerned by retail’s uncertainty—map out an exit strategy. Ideally, this is mapped out from the beginning of your sublease agreement.

If private practice is your goal, then focus on building a patient



“The important thing is to find a place you’ll be happy, can grow a practice, and make money.”

—ANDREW BLANKENSHIP, O.D., of Angelo Eye Center, located next to a Walmart Vision Center in San Angelo, TX

base and a brand, and develop relationships with other eyecare and healthcare professionals.

Don’t forget about commercial real estate, as this is an unknown for many corporate O.D.s. Become familiar ahead of time about what the rent per square foot is in your area, how much space you might need, what a lease contract might look like, and how much time it will take to build out if needed. Understanding these things will help you determine how much income you might need to start your new private practice.

An additional option for an exit strategy is to partner with a local optometrist or ophthalmologist to rent space from their office to move your practice.

Of course, moving to another

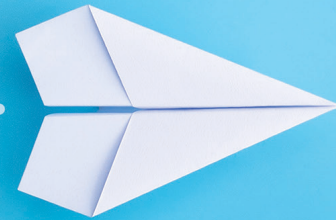


“When my corporate optical location closed, I decided it was time to start my own private practice...and it was a great decision.”



“I also took on fill-in work with For Eyes. I developed a great relationship with the organization, and we ended up opening a new location together. The balance between the two practices has been perfect.”

—MARIA SAMPALIS, O.D.



corporate optical situation that may seem more in line with your goals is also an excellent option.



Andrew Blankenship, O.D.

Angelo Eye Center,
San Angelo, TX

● “If the O.D. wishes to stay in a corporate setting, a strong exit strategy would be to analyze the top corporate brands, establish a connection with the corporate

recruiter of that brand you want to work with (or next door to), and start looking at where you’d like to set up your practice. Most corporate contracts let you out of your lease with a 60-day notice, so you need to review your contract and see what your terms are. The important thing is to find a place you’ll be happy, can grow a practice, and make money.”

—Andrew Blankenship, O.D., of Angelo Eye Center, located next to a Walmart Vision Center in San Angelo, TX



MARIA SAMPALIS, O.D.

is the founder of the Corporate Optometry group on Facebook and corporateoptometry.com.

Currently, she is owner of Sampalis Eye Care in Cranston, RI, and has a sublease at For Eyes by GrandVision in Rhode Island.

THE
INSIDE LINE...
WITH

Paula Puleo Blomquist

COT! chats with Paula Puleo Blomquist, chief marketing and merchandising officer at Eyemart Express, to get her take on what's on the horizon for the Dallas-based retailer

BY STEPHANIE K. DE LONG

Paula Puleo Blomquist knows corporate retail merchandising and marketing inside and out. She and her teams are responsible for all elements of frame buying and development for all Eyemart Express locations, more than 200 stores in 40 states across the country. On the marketing side, Blomquist's team is responsible for all media efforts, including PR, social media, and customer relationship marketing. Here, we catch up with this dynamic leader to get an inside view of Eyemart Express today and looking to the future.

GROWTH

Q. What are Eyemart Express' current plans for expansion?

A. "Entering Florida last summer was an exciting milestone because it also marked the opening of our 200th store. We are on track to open 25 new stores and expand into four new states this year. Our expanding footprint has led to growing our Eyemart family with hundreds of new store employees."



"More than 400 independent doctors of optometry currently have practices next to our stores."

OPTOMETRISTS

Q. How many O.D.s does Eyemart Express employ?

A. "More than 400 independent doctors of optometry currently have practices next to our stores. Our model allows the doctors to focus on patient care, while we, at Eyemart Express, own the business of running an optical dispensary with same-day service right next door."

POSITIONING

Q. What's Eyemart Express' main messaging?

A. "We launched 'The Right Team' brand campaign in 2017, with the supporting tagline of 'Right Glasses, Right Price, Right Now.'"

"We are positioned as a value player

PAULA PULEO
BLOMQUIST

in the optical space, offering great prices on both single-vision and progressive glasses. We also take pride in our robust product selection, which is comprised of more than 2,000 frames from name brands to our private label collections and sun.

“Our key differentiator is our speed. We have full-service labs in all stores and can deliver same-day glasses more than 90% of the time. These three

brand pillars are communicated across a fully diversified media plan that includes television, digital, local events, and CRM.”

MIX

Q. What’s Eyemart Express’ merchandising strategy?

A. “When you visit any of our stores, you will quickly see we have frames for everyone across price point and style.



“Our expanding footprint has led to growing our Eyemart family with hundreds of new store employees.”

We are very proud of the fashionable and high-quality private label brands we have created.

“This part of our merchandise strategy will remain a priority throughout 2020. We also carry designer brands that resonate with our customers.”

NEXT

Q. What’s ahead in 2020?

A. “We celebrate our 30th birthday this month and will continue to focus on the core values from our founding: providing excellent customer service and delivering on our brand promise of selection, price, and speed.

“Our mission is to ensure that our customers’ glasses are comfortable and they can see clearly.

“It’s a great day at Eyemart Express when a child gets their first pair of glasses and their vision is corrected. Their confidence shines right in front of us and they get to ring our #My-FirstGlasses cowbell. Who doesn’t want more cowbell!?” **COT!**

UNCOMMON CAREER PATH

Shereen Hakki, Ph.D., O.D.



Shereen Hakki, Ph.D., O.D.

Shereen Hakki, Ph.D., O.D., is a managing optometrist, field leader, and O.D. mentor with LensCrafters in King of Prussia, PA, as well as an associate professor at Salus University. How she got there is fascinating.



▶ Connect with Dr. Hakki via LinkedIn: bit.ly/drhakkilinkedin

1 **Ph.D. TO O.D.**
I was a pharmacist/ biochemist researching signal transduction in the eye when I was invited to join an accelerated program to certify optometrists and ophthalmologists from other parts of the world.

2 **WHY LENS CRAFTERS?**
 Corporate practice allows me the freedom to maintain my academic affiliation while pursuing my career. LensCrafters was an obvious choice due to their support of O.D.s with CEs and the newest and best technology, their giving-back program, OneSight, plus their encouragement of continuous growth and diversity in patient care and management.

3 **LEARNING + TEACHING**
 I am involved with the international program, and my role as an adjunct professor allows me to fulfill my passion for teaching and learning.

4 **RECRUITING + MENTORING**
 I have been involved with recruiting O.D.s and mentoring students. I am also an O.D. mentor for our region. It is extremely rewarding to be a liaison for my colleagues. **COT!**

—Stephanie K. De Long



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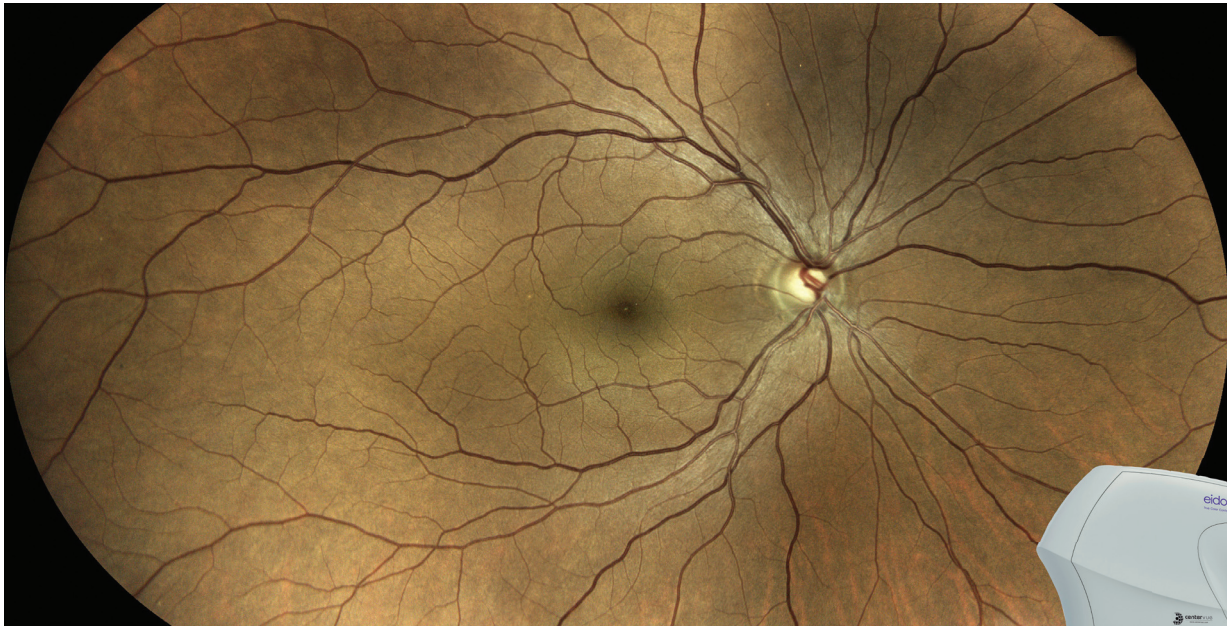
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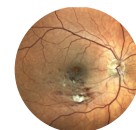
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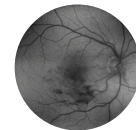
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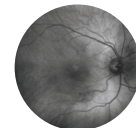
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