

THE ODC CONNECTION

October 2019

PentaVision



15

**Must-Know
Buying
Group+Alliance
Stats**

**5 STEPS TO
ELEVATE
CUSTOMER
SERVICE**

**Q&A WITH
IDOC's
DAVE BROWN**



THE PLAYERS

A Tear-Out
Guide to
Buying Groups

THE ODC FEATURE:

STRONGER TOGETHER

4 PRO O.D.S DIVULGE
AN INSIDE VIEW OF THE
KEY ADVANTAGES
OF JOINING FORCES WITH
AN OPTOMETRIC
ALLIANCE OR BUYING
GROUP



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FEATURES

12

Stronger Together

4 pro O.D.s divulge an inside view of the key advantages of joining forces with an optometric alliance or buying group.

16

The BIG ODC Research Feature

Must-read stats culled from the ODC reader survey on buying groups and optometric alliances that paint the picture of where ECPs align today.

18

The Players, Part I

A tear-out guide to the key players in the buying group space, complete with background on each + key features and benefits.

DEPARTMENTS

04 EDITOR'S LETTER

06 TO THE POINT

08 BEST PRACTICES PRIMER

10 THE CONNECTION Q+A

22 THE STARTING BLOCK



COVER STORY
Learn four BIG draws to belonging to a buying group or alliance, from the members themselves.

editor's letter



Stronger Together

In today's highly competitive marketplace, it's harder than ever to remain independent and thrive. The result? Ownership fatigue—and many O.D.s are looking for fresh ways to collaborate, align, and join together to remain independent, together.

Our brand new PentaVision publication—*The OD Connection*—steps up to the plate to deliver key

information, critical intel, and fresh ideas in the optometric alliance and buying group arena to help independent O.D.s make the right choices to be stronger, together.

In our cover feature—Stronger Together, starting on page 12—we deliver an insider, from-the-ground view of the key features + benefits of joining forces with an optometric alliance and/or buying group from the expert, veteran perspective. Four eyecare professionals (two belonging to alliances and two to buying groups) share their perspectives on everything from pricing and discounts to value-added services such as metrics, education, and meetings.

We also unpack the details on the optometric alliance and buying group landscape with a feature unveiling our exclusive market research. The results of *The OD Connection's* Alliances + Buying Group Focus Study (starting on page 16) reveal the facts on what ECPs across the country find most valuable from their buying group or alliance + how it's helping their bottom line.

There's also much, much more in this debut issue of *ODC*, so keep

on turning the pages. Don't miss our compelling interview with IDOC President Dave Brown (page 10), plus our guide to buying groups—*The Players: Part I*—starting on page 18 is an excellent resource to tear out and save.

Want more?

Look for three more enticing issues of *The OD Connection* coming your way in 2020, and check out our Facebook page:

@TheODConnection

We hope you enjoy the issue!

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

NEARLY THREE-QUARTERS OF OUR SURVEY RESPONDENTS REPORT AN INCREASE IN PROFITS SINCE JOINING A BUYING GROUP OR ALLIANCE, WITH AN AVERAGE PROFIT INCREASE OF

13%

THE VAST MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS

75%

SAY THEY'VE GOTTEN A POSITIVE RETURN ON THEIR INVESTMENT IN MEMBERSHIP THROUGH BENEFITS AND PRICING, AND ARE HAPPY THEY MADE THE DECISION TO JOIN.



IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue of ODC, 4 ECPs explain how their memberships in alliances or buying groups have helped them grow.

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To The Point

Info-packed sound bites from across the industry



INDEPENDENT ADVANTAGE

Healthy Eyes Advantage (HEA) recently appointed James Kirchner, O.D., to the newly created position of executive consultant for state and professional relations.

"[Dr. Kirchner] will advise HEA's leadership team and will be instrumental in ensuring HEA's programs are closely aligned with the needs of independents and the professional associations that serve them," says HEA Chairman and CEO Jim McGrann.

Here, we catch up with Dr. Kirchner to learn more about his new role + goals.

ODC: *How has your past experience prepared you for this new role?*



JAMES KIRCHNER, O.D.
Executive consultant, state and professional relations, Healthy Eyes Advantage

Dr. Kirchner: I've had extensive experience in optometry, including leadership roles in state (president), regional (president), and national optometric association (AOA) work. I've spent 33 years in private optometric practice and have been in leadership in the ophthalmic industry for the last nine years.

ODC: *How does HEA help the independent ECP?*

Dr. Kirchner: By providing value-added resources that will strengthen their private practice—resources dealing with lowering costs, managing staff personnel more effectively, staff training, providing effective dashboard business management diagnostics, a single-source payment system for all of their vendors, and enhanced patient communication tools.

ODC: *What is one of your top goals at HEA?*

Dr. Kirchner: To enhance the relationship between HEA and the state optometric associations, creating functioning, mutually beneficial partnerships.

INFO: healthyeyesadvantage.com

DATA DRIVEN

Nostalgic for report cards? "More and more, data is driving decision-making for independent optometry practices," says IDOC President and CEO Dave Brown.

"With the new IDOC Insider Report Card, we're adding a level of visual accessibility that will communicate key performance indicators quickly, clearly, and accurately."

The new graphical reporting feature (a complimentary benefit to IDOC members with GPN-compatible practice management systems) will display business performance in real time: clinical and optical revenue, sales volume by product type, performance benchmarks compared with participating IDOC member averages, and other key performance indicators (KPIs). Those KPIs are then analyzed by IDOC practice management experts to provide actionable next steps. We take that as an A+. **INFO:** idoc.net

REFORM READY

PECAA is prepped for healthcare reform. The alliance has launched a new program, the Integrated Eye Care Initiative (IECI), an extension of the Health Care Reform to Thrive program developed by OD Excellence prior to its merger with PECAA.

The new program aims to provide ECPs with the ability to negotiate for higher reimbursements and immerse themselves in local integrated care delivery networks, and to equip them with the tools needed to deliver better patient care.

INFO: pecaa.com/health-care-reform/





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Best Practices Primer



GOOD TO KNOW
If you want patients to stay loyal, you have to invest in their experience!

HEA's Lorie Lippiatt, O.D., shares how to enhance the customer experience in 5 smart and simple steps

Looking for bright ideas? Each issue of *The OD Connection* will offer up best practices—tips and strategies—in a critical corner of independent practice. This month's topic: enhancing the customer experience.

To unpack expertise on this vital subject, *ODC* tapped Lorie Lippiatt, O.D., executive vice president, professional relations, at Healthy Eyes Advantage and an optometrist in private practice in Salem Eye-care Center in Salem, OH.

Her keen observations follow.

—Stephanie K. De Long

As optometrists and practice owners, our focus has always been centered on patients. While retaining them is vital, the value of understanding and enhancing the customer or patient experience cannot be overstated.

■ THE EXPERIENCE

This encompasses their interaction with your practice through end-to-end experiences, not just single touch points. For example, a patient could receive excellent care during their examination, yet not be informed of a two-week delay in receiving their new eyewear due to a failed inspection at the optical lab.

As competition for patients increases across every channel, patients are increasingly exposed to confusing messaging, opportunities to partake in eyewear “deals,” and promises of convenience. If you want patients to stay loyal, you have to invest in their experience!

■ THE JOURNEY

Begin by realizing this is not a sprint! Changing a mindset within your practice to focus on the end-to-end patient

journey is an ongoing process, which will take time to implement.

Step #1... identify.

Identify your practice's value proposition—why patients would come to your office vs. any other—and get your entire staff on board.

Step #2... implement.

Experience the patient's journey. Enter through your front door. What are the first things you notice, smell, hear? What could be improved? How long does it take for a staff member to smile and greet you? Then implement a standard: “Our patients are greeted within five seconds or within five feet of the front door.” When traveling, make an appointment with an O.D. in a new area. Discuss highlights from your experience with staff.

Step #3... understand.

Who are your patients... elderly, younger, hipster, traditional, etc.? Understanding their needs and wants is the first step in connecting and empathizing with their situations and an important step in becoming patient-centric.

Step #4... connect.

Create an emotional connection with patients. Teach staff to make notes about a hobby, talent, or interest each patient may have.

Step #5... capture.

Capture feedback in real time. Use a patient engagement service to conduct post-visit surveys. Use feedback from these surveys in staff meetings to reinforce positive behaviors and role-play scenarios to improve skills.

Patient expectations are higher than ever, and they have many choices. By investing in staff training, understanding needs and wants, and delivering quality care and solutions, patients will have better reasons to remain loyal for years to come.



LORIE LIPPIATT, O.D.
Executive VP,
professional
relations, Healthy
Eyes Advantage

A Thriving Community Of 3,700 Independent Practitioners

Last year, PECAA merged with OD Excellence, an internationally recognized practice management group. The PECAA community saw additional programs, enhanced service offerings and new vendor partnerships added to their membership as a result of the merger.

With the additional resources and stronger purchasing power of the combined organization, PECAA is able to work behind the scenes to help members.

1) New Health Care Reform Program. PECAA is pleased to be the primary organization in the eyecare industry to help providers who want to transition to outcome-based care (as outlined in the 21st Century Cures Act). As the eyecare industry is on the cusp of the second wave of healthcare reform, PECAA has launched its Integrated Eye Care Initiative to help walk providers through the steps they need to take to begin implementing changes into their practice. Providers who choose to participate in the program will be able to negotiate for higher reimbursements, become full participants in local integrated care delivery networks, and ultimately,

deliver better patient care. Learn more at: pecaa.com/health-care-reform

2) Cold Start Practice Program. With a majority of optometry graduates moving into corporate optometry, PECAA wants to reward practitioners who decide to open a brand new practice. PECAA's Cold Start Practice Program offers special membership above and beyond its standard member programs. This includes free membership until the second 6 months of operation, a dedicated cold start advisor, special vendor programs, and customized tools and resources to help make the process as seamless as possible. Learn more at: pecaa.com/cold-start-practice-program

3) Training Workshops. PECAA hosts regional training workshops all across the US for members on a variety of topics. Managers, opticians, contact lens technicians, paraoptometric technicians, administrators, and billing specialists. Workshop topics range from merchandising and managing an optical, to selling strategies to combat online sales and improve capture rate, to interactive billing and coding training involving real-life coding scenarios. Workshops are free

to attend and are aimed at equipping eyecare practices with practical applications to real-life challenges they face every day. Learn more at: pecaa.com/workshops

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The Connection Q+A

ODC sits down with IDOC President and CEO Dave Brown



DAVE BROWN
President & CEO
of IDOC

Q WHAT IS IDOC'S KEY FOCUS TODAY?

A. We recently unveiled our new messaging, "Dream It. Do It," which epitomizes our "Why" (based on tenets of Simon Sinek)—"To empower independent owners to live the practice of their dreams."

Q WHAT ARE IDOC'S NEW INITIATIVES?

A. We are always innovating, and our latest is the IDOC Insider, which offers unlimited access to state-of-the-art business analytics to all members:

1. Five key practice dashboards, powered by GPN,
2. Customized insights based on metrics, and
3. Exclusive tools and promotions to address key opportunities.

Q PLEASE EXPLAIN SOME OF IDOC'S POINTS OF DIFFERENTIATION.

A. Every member has a practice development manager who is dedicated to the support and growth of their practice, ensuring that the member maximizes all that IDOC offers:

- **Consulting Experts** with over 100 years of combined experience: financial, HR, marketing, optical, and practice management.

- **IDOC Insider**, a powerful support tool offered at no additional cost.

- **IDOC Select**, unique benefits including superior pricing and rebates based on share of contact lenses dispensed, *not* required practice growth.

Q PLEASE TELL US MORE ABOUT IDOC SERVICES.

A. They range from services in HR and financial navigation to extensive peer-to-peer interaction and education/CE opportunities all year long.

- **HR Services**

1. A legally vetted handbook that clarifies staff performance standards and benefits eligibility, and

2. A mobile-enabled employee testing offering given to candidates and/or current staff. This new assessment tool goes beyond standard personality tests to offer deeper insights and a simpler approach to comparing skills and attitudes. It also

provides an interview question guide and job development insights.

- **Navigation Services** provide advice about financial considerations on buying or selling practices as well as advice on partnerships.

Q HOW CAN ECPs MAXIMIZE THEIR ROI IN TODAY'S ALLIANCE SPACE?

A. I urge independent O.D.s to choose *one* alliance and to utilize their programs and services for maximum advantage (of course, I suggest IDOC).

Q HOW DO YOU VIEW THE ALLIANCE LANDSCAPE?

A. Alliances that innovate will be around for the long run. It can't be only about buying power, rebates, and discounts. Innovative resources must be offered to empower independent practice success.

Looking ahead, data and insights are more critical than ever. Alliances that gain the trust of the independent owner to share their data so it can be put to use for the practice's advantage will grow and prosper.

—Stephanie K. De Long



GOOD TO KNOW
"We are always innovating, and our latest is IDOC Insider, offering unlimited access to state-of-the-art business analytics to all members."

Simplicity is the Ultimate Sophistication

AXIS 900 Auto Lensometer

"I've used many different auto lensometers and made an accurate, high-speed lensometer that's perfect for my fast-paced practice. No need to fumble with menu setting and options; just read the lens, print the ticket, and get back to the customer".

– Ben Urso, ABOC | Lindy Eye Care



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STRONGER TOGETHER

BY STEPHANIE K. DE LONG



Joining forces is the name of the game in today's competitive landscape.



GOOD TO KNOW
 “[Our alliance has] a comprehensive system that provides invaluable data for owners who want to analyze their performance quickly and efficiently.”



Online sales, chain retailers and big-box stores, private equity optometry, and the list goes on. Independent ECPs are experiencing more competition than ever before in today’s unique optical landscape for everything from eyewear sales to patient exams.

How can ECPs dial in a more competitive strategy today? For many, joining forces with an optometric alliance or buying group has become an integral part of the strategic plan.

Here, we check in with four ECPs—two belonging to buying groups and two to optometric alliances—to learn the key reasons to join + how they each make the most of their relationship for purchasing and beyond. And, in some instances, way beyond.

The four ECPs invited to share their insights are:

BUYING GROUP MEMBERS



AMANDA BARKER, O.D.
Advanced Family Eye Care, in Denver, NC, a member of PERC for three years



GENE BATTIFARANO
owner, Anderson Eye Care in Cliffside Park, NJ, a 16-year member of Villavecchia Buying Group

ALLIANCE MEMBERS



JENNIFER CHINN, O.D.
Dr. Chinn’s Vision Care, San Diego, a second-generation Vision Source member



AMY ENDO
master optician/ practice administrator at Edwin Y Endo & Associates in Aiea, HI, a member of PECAA

Here, 4 practitioners lay out the pluses of buying groups + alliances.

“As an individual private practice, your bargaining power and voice [can be] extremely limited.”

—Jennifer Chinn, O.D.



GOOD TO KNOW
55% of ODC's survey respondents who belong to buying groups or alliances have been members for over 20 years.

WHY JOIN?

The reasons vary, but the value in doing so does not.

■ **PURCHASING**

PECAA's group buying power connects members to 70+ vendors offering discounts up to 50%, explains Endo.

■ **NEXT LEVEL** “We were part of a different group,” explains Dr. Barker, “but, as our practice grew, I needed help to move us to the next level. PERC was the right choice.”

■ **ATTITUDE**

“I went between two groups for a while,” says Battifarano. “The more I dealt with Villavecchia, the more it became a personal relationship. I switched because they are friendly, caring, and understand my needs.”

■ **NEW GRAD**

“Vision Source is the alliance my father chose,” explains Dr. Chinn. “Since joining the practice, I've seen a huge benefit as a new graduate to being part of the group.”

PURCHASING POWER

What about the benefits of buying through their group of choice?

■ **Dr. Barker:** “There are no fees or contracts, so there's no trying to recoup fees with PERC. Plus, they bring huge value by partnering with premium vendors. And, Perc Advantage helps you get premium products faster and at a better price.”

■ **Endo:** “They have really competitive discounts (up to 50%), and I like PECAA's Member Rebate Program that combines all vendor rebates in one quarterly check.”

■ **Dr. Chinn:** “As an individual private practice, your bargaining power and voice is extremely limited. But as part of Vision Source, we can voice our needs to vendors and the industry with a larger impact.”

■ **Battifarano:** “Of course, I'm saving money, but why go anywhere else when you also get the benefit of their knowledge and assistance in different areas. If I have a problem, I know that Villavecchia will help.”

VALUE-ADDED SERVICES

Purchasing is just part of the package for these ECPs.

■ **LEADERSHIP**

“PERC has quarterly regional meetings and education,” says Dr. Barker, “but what stands out to me is the leadership group, PPA [Perc President's Alliance]. Practices come together from across the country to work on things like how to home in on metrics and financials, and then learn how to measure them.”

■ **METRICS**

Endo points to the value of metrics with PECAA. “They provide both national and local numbers, along with information like pay scales in our area. There

is also a comprehensive system available that provides invaluable data for owners who want to analyze their performance quickly and efficiently.”

■ **NEWSLETTER**

Battifarano also finds Villavecchia's newsletter a real plus. “I've found people looking for work and have bought furnishings from ads in there. I also got my credit card through the group. It's a great rate and good service.”

■ **NETWORKING**

“Being a Vision Source member extends beyond tangibles like pricing and buying power,” explains Dr. Chinn. “It allows me so many networking opportunities to learn and grow as a new graduate and soon-to-be sole business owner. The meetings and education set it apart.”

In the end, with all the features and benefits that buying groups and optometric alliances deliver today, what's the bottom-line benefit of joining one of these organizations? “To ensure that each one of us,” concludes Dr. Chinn, “is the best private-practice clinician and business owner that we can be.”

“As everything becomes more corporate, having a personal relationship with a group becomes more valuable.”

—Gene Battifarano



4 BIG DRAWS

ALL FOUR ECPs SHARE THE KEY REASONS THEY RECOMMEND ALLIANCES AND BUYING GROUPS.

→ Collaboration

“Our industry and our patients’ perspectives are changing so fast,” explains Dr. Barker, “that in order to stay relevant and maintain a highly competitive independent practice, it is important to collaborate.”

→ **ROI** “Even though there are monthly payments/fees,” says Endo, “I recommend joining a group because the return on investment far exceeds—and is well worth—the fees.”

→ Relationships

“As everything becomes more corporate, having a personal relationship with a group becomes more valuable,” explains Battifarano.

→ Community

“If you’re a new grad like me,” says Dr. Chinn, “you didn’t learn a lot about business management, HR, profit and loss analysis, etc. For me, Vision Source is a community. We build each other up, learn from each other, and share our experiences.”

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

The OD Connection's exclusive market research reveals what ECPs across the country find most valuable from their buying group or alliance + how it's helping their bottom line

There is strength in numbers. This is the founding concept behind optometric buying groups and doctor alliances—clearly, negotiating for prices and services as a group is more effective than doing it solo.

How are eyecare professionals benefiting from their memberships in these groups, and how are they using these partnerships to benefit their revenue?

The OD Connection's exclusive Alliances + Buying Group Focus Group Study (a survey of ECPs across the country) reveals the facts.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

So what does our survey of buying group and doctor alliance members reveal? Some key results:

■ A Growing Trend

More than half (54%) of survey respondents say they belong to a buying group, and

35% report membership in an optometric alliance. What's more,

31% of buying group members joined within the last 10 years and

34% of doctor alliance members joined within the same time frame.

■ Pricing Matters

The biggest motivator for joining the groups is to get better pricing on goods, survey respondents say—

96% ranked special pricing as the “most important” reason for joining.

■ Good Business

Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents report an increase in profits since joining a buying group or alliance, with

13% being the average increase.

75% of respondents (75%) say they've gotten a positive return on their investment in membership through benefits and pricing, and are happy they made the decision to join.

MEMBERSHIP

Healthy Eyes Advantage (formed via the merger of several buying groups) is the group most survey respondents belong to. For membership info, see chart, opposite page.

PROFITABILITY

Good pricing is why the majority of members join a buying group

or alliance. And it seems to be paying off in their profits.

Since you've been a member, has your profitability increased or decreased?

70% INCREASED

28% NOT SURE

2% DECREASED

How much has your profitability changed?

13% INCREASED

3% DECREASED

Has the return on investment for a membership been worth it for your business?

75% YES

19% NOT SURE

6% NOT APPLICABLE



GOOD TO KNOW
25% of buying group members belong to more than one group, and 13% of alliance members belong to more than one alliance.

Why did you join your buying group/alliance?

"[To get] support for the staff to help the practice succeed, and to get advice from other private-practice doctors on business practices that have been successful."

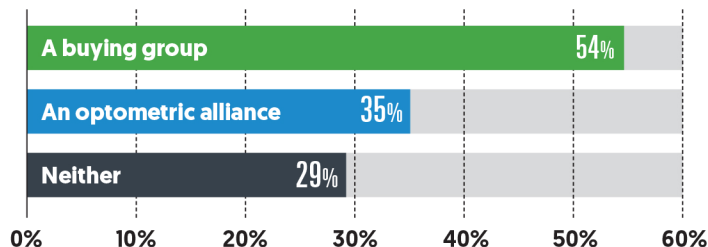
—Survey Respondent

Since joining, what has been the biggest benefit to your business?

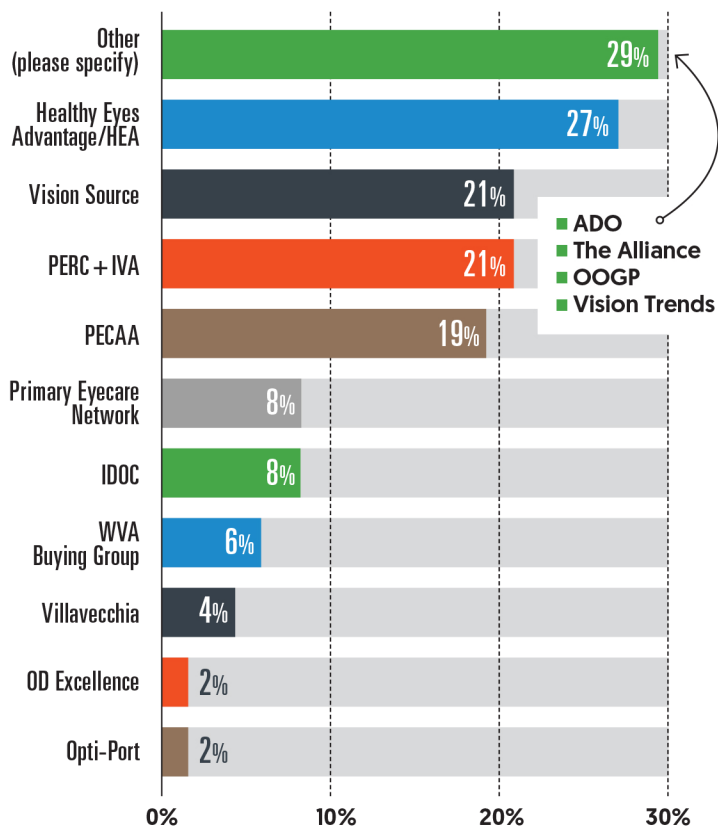
"The intangibles that it provides more than make up for the investment."

—Survey Respondent

Do you belong to an optometric buying group or a doctor alliance?



To which buying groups/alliances do you belong?



THE BENEFITS THAT MATTER

Though special pricing on optical goods is the most cited membership benefit in a buying group or doctor alliance, there are other benefits as well—including staff education and marketing resources. Here's what our survey respondents say they also like:

BENEFITS RANKED BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS AS "VERY IMPORTANT"

Special product pricing

96%

Business education

58%

Staff training

58%

Professional network meetings

49%

Digital marketing resources

42%

Social media resources

40%

In-house marketing resources

40%

Special house-branded products

38%

LOOKING FOR MORE?

When asked if there is need for a benefit or service that's not currently being offered by their group or alliance, 63% of respondents answered "No." Here's a sample of what was named by those who answered "Yes."

- HELPING A PRACTICE GROW, MAINLY THROUGH NEW PATIENTS
- PRACTICE MANAGEMENT
- STAFF TRAINING
- MORE BRANDS
- COLLECTION AGENCY
- HEALTH INSURANCE
- PRACTICE BUYOUTS

THE PLAYERS

part 1

CONSIDERING JOINING
A BUYING GROUP?
THIS TEAR-OUT GUIDE OF
THE KEY PLAYERS
IS YOUR GO-TO SOURCE
FOR THE BUYING
GROUP SPACE.



There are numerous choices when it comes to selecting a buying group to work with, but each is different in its own way. Here, we break down the basics of six of the key buying group players to help you decide which option is right for your business.

ADO Practice Solutions

ADO Practice Solutions aims to help make owning an independent eye-care practice easier and more profitable, providing tools to “power up” practices. The organization offers three membership levels so that individuals can find a membership that’s right for their practice. adopracticesolutions.com

Combine Buying Group

Established in 1981, Combine Buying Group enhances the ability of its members

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COMPLETE.
CONNECT.
CHANGE.



COMPLETE

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DISCOVER YOUR PATH. JOIN



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THE PLAYERS

part 1

Continued from page 18

to obtain cost-justified volume-priced discounts, allows offices “pay-as-you-go” alternatives, and features hassle-free billing, member support, and more.

■ combinebuyinggroup.com

Healthy Eyes Advantage

Healthy Eyes Advantage (HEA) is a single-source partner for easy access to the eyecare industry’s purchasing programs and service solutions. With more than 10,000 members and 200 strategic vendor partners, HEA offers a purchasing and practice solutions marketplace for independent eyecare professionals nationwide.

The HEA has also given more than \$12 million back to the 18 state associations it’s endorsed by nationwide.

■ healthyeeyesadvantage.com

Professional Eyecare Resource Co-Operative

The Professional Eyecare Resource Co-Operative (PERC) represents more than 10,000 eyecare professionals practicing in more than 5,000 locations. PERC aligns with leading vendors in the industry to offer cost savings, efficiency, and education to its members, with the core commitment of supplying independent ECPs with tools to be competitive in today’s market.

■ percalliance.com



GOOD TO KNOW
 Nearly three-quarters of *The OD Connection* research survey respondents report an increase in profits since joining a buying group or alliance—with an average profit increase of

13%

The Alliance

The Alliance supports the strategic objectives of ECPs (whether a single practice or multilocation clinic) by building pathways toward success through enhancing operating procedures and cost savings with optical and med-surg supply programs. The buying group offers customized plans and tailored marketing services.

■ thealliancebg.com

Villavecchia

Family-owned and -operated since 1980, the Alfred J. Villavecchia Buying Group is dedicated to providing personalized customer service while maintaining accurate, detailed, and prompt monthly statements. There is no cost to join, and the organization charges no administration fees.

■ villavecchia.com

Do you work with—or for—a buying group not included on our list? Please email kerri.raimo@penta-visionmedia.com.

—Compiled by Kerri Ann Raimo



A NEW MAGAZINE FROM EB!

THE BUYING GROUP + ALLIANCE MAGAZINE FOR EYE CARE PROFESSIONALS



In Print + Online

Be sure to follow *The OD Connection* on social media via these *Eyecare Business* outlets!



Vital Information for ODs Who Believe There's Strength in Numbers

Perhaps you, like many of today's private practice ODs, are overwhelmed by online retail competition, mired in managed care minutiae, and suffering from staffing woes. Many ODs are moving to a strength-in-numbers mindset. More than half are now members of a buying group and one-third part of a doctor alliance.

This organized niche has unique challenges and specific information needs, which is why *Eyecare Business* created *The OD Connection*, written specifically for ODs in buying groups and alliances.

The OD Connection debuts in 2019 as a print magazine delivered to you along with *Eyecare Business*, as well as a digital magazine accessible through the *EB* website. Look for issues of *The OD Connection* in 2020:

2020 Issues: March | June | October

Covering Group and Alliance Members' Biggest Challenges:

- Maintaining competitive pricing
- Understanding and profiting with managed care
- Staying on top of staff training
- Competing with online entities
- Making time for marketing
- Offering a broad product selection
- Simplifying billing

and much more!

From the publishers and expert editorial team at

eb.
EYECARE BUSINESS

VISION SOURCE'S BEGINNINGS

Mario Gutierrez, O.D.

In this regular column, ODC checks in with veteran O.D.s to get their best time-learned tips for what they wish they knew when first starting out with a buying group or optometric alliance.

"It'll never work!" Mario Gutierrez, O.D., FAAO, recalls. "That's what I told my friend. I'd been in private practice in San Antonio for about six months and was approached by my optometry school roommate.

"He told me about his idea of starting a network of like-minded optometrists. Though I didn't think it would work, by the end of the evening I told him, 'Since you are my friend, and I am broke anyway, what are they going to do if this doesn't work...repossess my retinoscope?' So, I signed our first agreement...on a restaurant bar napkin."

That friend's name? Glenn Ellisor, O.D., soon to become the founder of Vision Source. His plan? "To launch the network in Houston, and he asked me to establish Vision Source San Antonio. That was 28 years ago."



GOOD TO KNOW Vision Source is a network of over 3,200 locally owned practices and 4,500 doctors; it operates under franchise law but O.D.s remain independent.

Tip #1

STAY THE COURSE

"Join if it makes good business sense and you have vetted the various alliances. Go with your gut, and don't agonize with analysis paralysis. The members who are most satisfied and stay with a particular alliance are those who commit to dedicating the time and changes to take advantage of all the programs and cost-of-goods savings. It makes absolutely no sense to jump in one alliance and then out into another group."

Tip #2

USE THE TOOLS

"The group itself won't make you successful, but using the right tools will. Model your success after those who are already successful in the alliance and ask your colleagues for help when you need it."



MARIO GUTIERREZ, O.D.
FAAO,
founder of the San Antonio Vision Source network

The biggest surprise in joining the alliance?

THE CAMARADERIE

"I was not expecting that when we started," says Dr. Gutierrez. "You collaborate, talk about practice issues/successes, truly help each other, especially when difficult situations arise, and become very close lifelong friends."

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