

# PRACTICE RESTART – OPTICAL PLAN

## COMMENTARY

04-27-20      YOUR PATIENTS NEED NEW GLASSES

“Remote work will outlast the coronavirus” said Mary Meeker in her influential annual forecast. “The analyst turned venture capitalist predicts that many of the technologies companies have used to weather the coronavirus pandemic will have staying power. The mass closure of offices and stores was a “big experiment” in remote working. Many companies have discovered they can operate just as efficiently – sometimes more so – than before, thanks to tools like Slack and Zoom. That realization “will likely change the way lots of office work is done,” Meeker wrote. (*BoF 2020*)

I don’t mean to be self-serving, but this whole video conferencing thing, something I avoided showing my face on before recent events unfolded, much to the annoyance of my manager, has me shook, as the kids say. The day I learned how to hide self-view on Zoom was a good day indeed, an “ahead day”.

Business consultant Simon Sinek tells us that in these times of uncertainty, it is useful not to define your days as good days or bad days, especially when the general structure of your days are not just the same, repetitive, but unchangeable by you or any other means. Instead, try to consider, did I get ahead today? Or did I fall behind? This approach suggests a sliding scale rather than a binary guilt trip.

**Zoom meeting,  
audio only**



**Zoom meeting  
with video**



I’ve had a lot of ahead days; things are falling into a rhythm. We’re maintaining a schedule. I’m getting closer to my daughter and my husband. My frames, however, have been mounting, piling up “behind” days for weeks now and I fear there is no recovering. My frames have called it quits. And staring at them every day, on full Zoom display, for all to see, including me... well... *\*hide self-view\**.

I need new frames,  
And your patients do too.  
They will be back!  
Then what will you do?

(A 3-year-old reads a lot of Dr. Seuss...)

## SECTION 1: PEOPLE

### 04-27-20 HOW TO SELL DURING A PANDEMIC

Payment sensitivity will be an issue for some of your patients, if not the majority. The time to bring up payment options is when the patient arrives at the office, not during or after trying on frames. When payment options are raised while looking at product, the patient is given the uncomfortable impression that you are assuming they cannot afford it and the likelihood of them leaving with nothing increases exponentially. Post large signage in the window and at the front desk addressing the patient's concerns. "How have our payment options changed? Ask us about Care Credit today." Or something similar. If you do not currently use Care Credit or another patient payment solution, consider allowing the patient to pay by credit card, charging them for example, 50% now, 25% in 30 days, and the final 25% in 60 days.

Focus on how your patient's lifestyle has changed. Start by observing the patient, then ask a question.

**Example:** Is the patient wearing a semi-rimless metal meant for the boardroom and not the playroom?  
**Question: "How are you coping at home?"** If they mention their kids, suggest something more comfortable, a full frame acetate with snap-off hinges, removable temples, or flexible material to minimize the possibility of damage to their investment frames and make them more comfortable.

**Example:** Can you see yourself in their lenses? **Question: "How has your work life shifted?"** If they mention remote work or Zoom, suggest an AR coating with Bluelight protection. No one wants to host a Facebook Live with a reflection of an iPhone in their glasses.

The key to addressing patient's needs while being sensitive to their circumstances, financial constraints, and the timing of the exam book, is to Announce, Observe, and Ask... AOA... get it?

1. Announce payment information early and often without discrimination
2. Observe patients' current eyewear and plan to address areas of improvement
3. Ask open-ended questions to uncover changes in their circumstances that would prompt a purchase

And above all, let them walk. If you mention something twice and you know they heard you but don't bite, let them walk away and check on them another day, utilizing the patient follow-up process suggested below in *Getting Complete Jobs in Patients Hands*.

## SECTION 2: PRODUCT

### 04-27-20 UNDERSTANDING THE CONSUMER MINDSET: THE LIPSTICK EFFECT

The Lipstick Effect is defined as consumers' desire for luxuries in a crisis. Because a lipstick is typically the entry-level price point into any designer brand, a gateway for aspirational consumers, the smallest thing one can buy when the bigger things are out of reach. These consumers always exist, there are just more people feeling the pinch during times of macro-economic stress.

What we are seeing now is the "The Eyeliner Effect". Teeth whitening, eyebrow maintenance, and at-home skincare are trending. Everything is on the table in a crisis. This time, the rise of video-conferencing means everything on the table is above the neck.

"Beauty brands say business is booming even as major economies nosedive and millions of people find themselves suddenly unemployed. But now that face masks are the accessory *du jour*, lipstick is out and mascara (or lashes, concealer, eyeliner, skin-care products and anything else that can be applied to the upper third of one's face) is in." That has to include glasses, don't you think? Well, yes...

"The adoption of masks, scarves, bandanas and other protective coverings has put increased emphasis on the top portion of the face." Oliver Wright, global lead for consumer goods at Accenture says, "It's this demand that could help retailers buck a recession." (*BoF 2020*)

1. Resist the urge to focus on so-called "value" product. For patients who want to indulge, designer is the name of the game. Ensure your Optical is stocked with, and displaying beautifully, a minimum of 3 brands that boast color, unique shapes, and high-quality craftsmanship. Don't forget to offer options for men, otherwise ensure your signature brands are genderless.
2. Think of the frames you put on your patients as their daily affirmation, a reassurance that yes, things will get better, your economic situation will improve, and we are here for you now, and then. No one needs to be reminded that things are hard, we know that already. And no one needs to look drab just because it's dreary.
3. Focus on maximizing the frame allowance (at a minimum) for those with insurance.
4. And for those without, offer payment plans via Care Credit and others that allow them to indulge.

### 04-27-20 SHOULD YOU BE OFFERING DEEP DISCOUNTS IN THE OPTICAL?

If the idea of offering a "Coronavirus Special" seems very uncomfortable and opportunistic, there are other ways to convey your concern for patients who may have to watch expenses more closely. We know there will be those patients who may have lost income, lost vision care coverage or incurred unexpected bills, and some that will be experiencing all of these and untold other hardships. You will also be seeing patients that may not have a significant change in the way they see their eyewear choices. They continue to demand a high standard of quality, a fashion-forward look and the best experience possible under the circumstances.

There are ways to satisfy everyone without severe discounts and a major change in the brand you have tried to build. Package pricing, personalized frame selection, flexible delivery options and virtual services can all contribute to improving the customer experience. As you return to seeing people for routine

eyecare the most important reassurance you can give your clientele is that they can trust you to satisfy all their eyewear needs in one place. You want people to have total confidence that you continually seek to improve the service and products you deliver, and of course you offer eyeglasses to fit everyone's budget.

## Package Pricing

This is a good time to introduce package pricing. Aside from the fact that the industry is moving sharply in that direction, disruptions such as we are experiencing now allow us to try new things. Three-tiered pricing demonstrates that you have a full spectrum to choose from. The transparency of this system reduces a consumer's anxiety level and increases their trust that you will have what they are looking for and are pricing it fairly.

To set up your pricing model, review the lenses you use most frequently for each level below. Determine the frame price you would include for each category. Put together several hypothetical orders, you will find they stay in a pretty tight range. Take the average of these orders and round that price to the next \$49 or \$99. Here is an example of how that might look, make any adjustments you think best for your practice location, lab pricing and local competition.

### 1. Entry-Level

This would be a basic pair of glasses that would be very affordable for those with no VCP. For vision care plan participants, they would pay only their basic materials co-pay and AR copay (strongly advised, but optional.)

- *\$199 SV, \$299 Progressive. Complete with any frame up to \$129, including basic AR*

### 2. Mid-Level

Expand this collection to include a wide range of moderately priced frames, upgraded lens materials and coatings

- *\$299 SV, \$399 Progressive. Complete with any frame up to \$199, including next-level lenses with upgraded coatings*

### 3. Luxury

This offering reassures the most style conscious consumers that they can still indulge in their favorite brand, and that your practice hasn't abandoned your commitment to a wide selection that includes many luxury frames.

- *\$499 SV, \$699 and up\* Progressives Frame value up to \$299, for frames above \$299, simply pay the package price and any amount over \$299. This package includes a best-in-class, premium, digital lens with superior, high definition optics. \*VERBIAGE: There are limited exclusions that the optician will be happy to review with you upon request\**

Of course you will encourage the customer to see the value in pairing the frame and lens choice, but if a patient is interested in a better frame, but basic lenses, they can simply pay the basic package price plus the frame price difference. (Pat Basile, IDOC Consultant 2020)

## SECTION 3: PLACE

### 04-27-20 GETTING COMPLETE JOBS IN PATIENT HANDS

This crisis has given us a gift, the liberty to entertain options that we have avoided in the past. By bending to patient preferences and offering options and choice, we can more fully engage with our patients and provide the 360 service we pride ourselves on in a way that satisfies their unique concerns and circumstances. Many people would welcome the option to receive their eyewear directly to their home from your trusted lab, some might opt for a no-contact express pick-up and others will still want a full personal fitting. After your exam room frame try-on, ask each patient how they would like to receive their eyewear and provide a minimum of two options. Be sure to let them know they are always welcome to return for adjustments (by appointment if that is the new policy). Having that kind of choice may influence them to order from you rather than a discount, online or big box retailer.

**Ship-to-Home Solutions.** Now unlike ever before, ship-to-home solutions are a viable option that has the potential to increase your capture rate, profitability, and consumer satisfaction. Work with your suppliers (labs or frame manufacturers) to help you reduce your shipping costs. Ask if they can provide free shipping to you to compensate or if the lab is willing to ship direct to the patient.

If shipping costs have you worried, consider utilizing staff to execute **Home Delivery**. The personal touch will go a long way and allow for contact-less drop-off while eliminating wait times and shipping costs.

If Home Delivery just isn't your bag, now is the time for **Dispensing Appointments**. Facing a reduced exam book, focus on utilizing *Pre-Selections* (detailed previously) and letting your patients shop while still in the exam lane. While keeping exam patients in the lane, look at your book to determine the appropriate time for a patient to return to retrieve their eyewear.

1. Call patients to let them know their frames are ready and tell them to arrive at a specific time, always, of course, asking first if there is a day and time they prefer.
2. Have the frames ready, out of the in-house lab if you have one, packaged in the case, in a branded bag, with a thank you card pre-written and included. The card should have the name of the Optician or team member who helped the patient and would be most familiar with the job. Also include their direct line or extension if applicable, and a note: "Call me any time if you are not 100% happy with your eyewear."
3. Complete a fitting only if the patient requests it. They won't. A frame fitting is another touchpoint that could cause health concerns for your team and your patients.
4. To keep staff busy with a reduced exam book, allocate specific times during each day to follow up with patients whether they purchased product from you or not. Prioritize those who picked up their eyewear and did not opt for a fitting. Ask them to rate their eyewear on comfort on a scale of 1-10. Anything less than a 10 should prompt an in-depth conversation to determine whether the patient needs to return to the practice for either a vision correction or a fitting.

To take Dispensing Appointments a step further, utilize **Curbside Pickup**. Do everything detailed in scheduling Dispensing Appointments but instead of having the patient enter the office, bring their purchase to them in the car.

None of these approaches are new or not being utilized today already in the market. Now is the time to shift the tried and true, legacy behaviors that we have utilized for too long and meet the patients how they want to be met. Mentioning Ship-to-Home Solutions, Home Delivery, scheduling a Dispensing Appointment, and Curbside Pickup while selling your patients frames in the exam lane, will serve to increase your capture rate while making your patient feel heard, even if you're offering options they never knew they always wanted.

## HOW IDOC CAN HELP

The IDOC resource center provides links to many helpful articles, forms, webinars and podcasts on these topics and others. You can access it here: [IDOC COVID-19 Resource Center](#)

Our Optical Consultants are available on demand to help you identify your inventory goals and understand your reality. **Call or email them today to review what your ideal inventory level.** Just as we know our annual revenue, these numbers are critical so that we can move forward to our next steps.