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Five Ways to Boost Optical Sales in the Age of Online Retailers

Rendia

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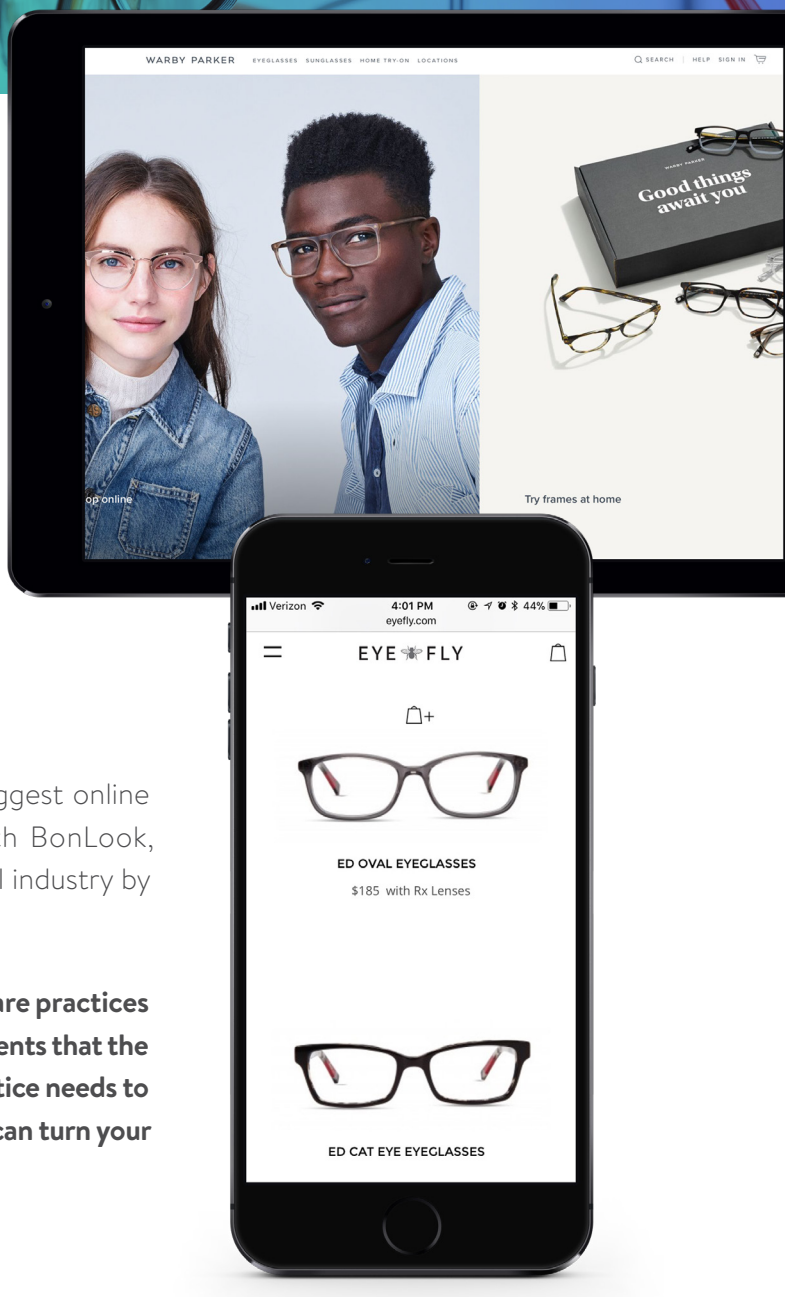
[Intro]
5 Ways to Boost Optical Sales in the Age of Online Retailers



*How can eye care providers **stay competitive** with online eyewear brands like Warby Parker?*

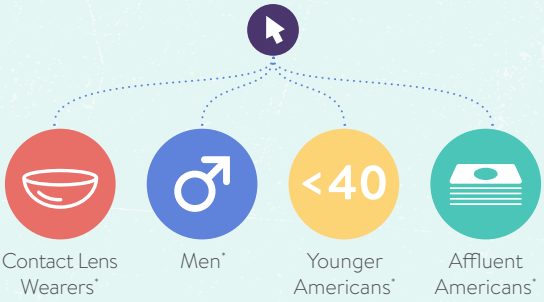
Your optical dispensary is typically responsible for nearly two-thirds of your practice's profits—meaning that if your optical sales take a hit, your practice could be at risk. While well-managed optical shops have proven to be great profit centers for the eye care industry, these days, eye care providers are up against some major competition: *online eyewear retailers.*

Brands like Warby Parker—probably eye doctors' biggest online competition, according to VisionWeb—along with BonLook, Lookmatic, Eyefly, and others have taken the optical industry by storm, capturing consumers' interest, and dollars.

In this eBook, we'll cover the major retail trends eye care practices need to be aware of, what eye doctors can provide patients that the big brand names simply can't, the strategies your practice needs to stay competitive, and actionable insights for how you can turn your optical dispensary into a well-oiled revenue machine.

THE COMMODITIZATION OF EYEWEAR

Who's most likely to buy online?



What are they buying?

30%
of recent buyers purchased **contact lenses** online.*

22.5%
of recent buyers purchased **prescription eyeglasses** online.*

Why are they buying online?

The #1 reason consumers are turning to online retailers is **cost.***

How are they being influenced?

Online retailers consistently send patients the message that their glasses are the **same quality** and **cost less** than physical retailers'.†

*Source: Vision Council's 2015 VisionWatch Internet Influence Report

†Source: Review of Optometry

1

Meeting the Expectation of Around-the-Clock Online Access

[THE TREND]

Around-the-Clock Online Access

There's no getting around the fact that what online eyewear retailers offer that is truly valuable to today's average consumer is the ability to shop for and purchase eyeglasses online—anywhere, anytime.

[YOUR STRATEGY]

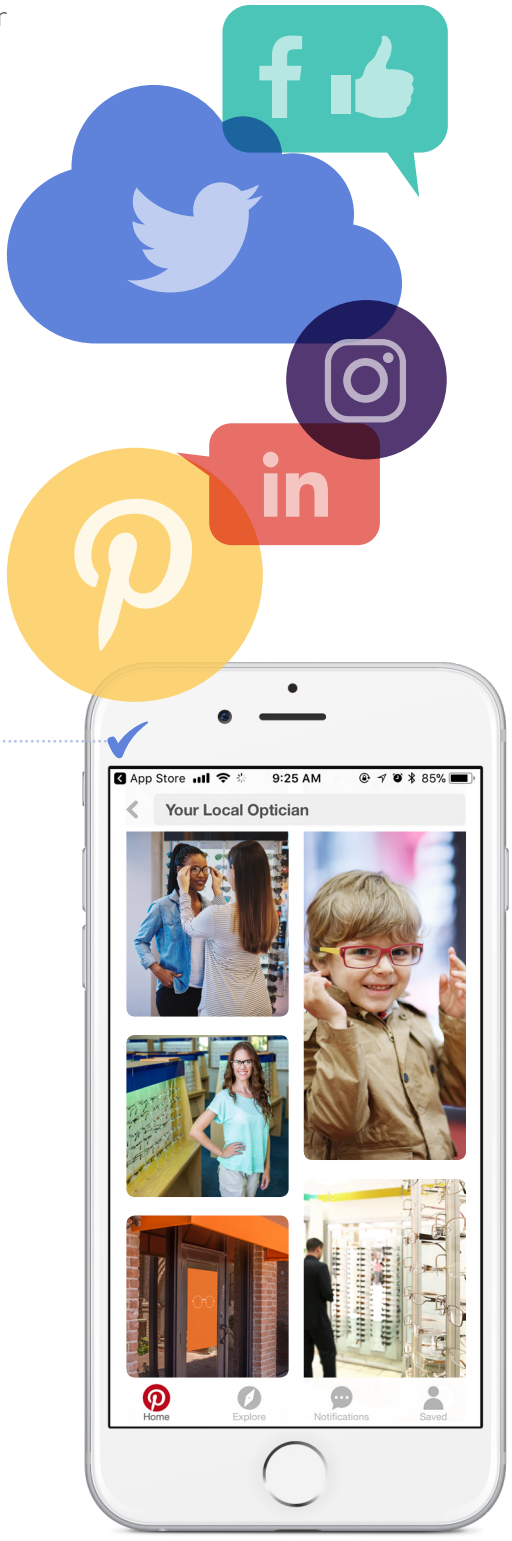
Match online eyewear retailers' around-the-clock online access, and raise them an ***unforgettable patient experience***.

To meet the exact expectation of around-the-clock access, you might consider enlisting your own online retailer. Services like MyOnlineOptical.com bridge the gap between brick-and-mortar optical dispensaries and online retailers. Although it is worth noting that MyOnlineOptical.com is owned by optical distribution giant, Essilor, the company nevertheless provides a retail solution for eye care professionals so they can get in on the online sales trend.

For eye care providers who might be opposed to online eyewear shopping, there are other ways to meet this expectation. Namely, *social media*.

By housing your eyewear inventory online, *you're giving customers 24/7 access to your eyewear selection without succumbing to the online retail trend.*

Virtual bulletin board, Pinterest, has become increasingly popular with eye care practices as a way to showcase their frame selection and attract potential patients. The highly-visual online platform is regularly visited by about 31 percent of adult Internet users—71 percent of whom are women. To distinguish yourself from Warby Parker's popular Pinterest account, try spotlighting local flair that patients will recognize and gravitate toward.



Other, more saturated, social media sites like Instagram and Facebook then give you the opportunity to show off happy patients in their new frames. Mixing posts that highlight your extensive eyewear selection with posts that feature your office culture and personality will make your practice feel inviting and give patients a reason to stop by for the final purchase.

A word to the wise: simply leveling the playing field is not enough to compete with brands like Warby Parker. For your practice to maintain a real advantage over online retailers, make sure your customers get a one-of-a-kind, memorable patient experience from the moment they walk through the door.

Many optical dispensaries now offer extended hours on evenings and weekends, walk-in appointments, and same-day service. These are smart ways to attract today's breed of customers, who are used to instant gratification and 24/7 access.

Other more tactical approaches, such as sending patients home with a care package to go with their new glasses, or guaranteeing a warranty with every eyewear purchase, are enticing offers that will differentiate your practice from the competition and leave your patients feeling confident in their buying decision. Even better? They won't have any reason to shop around online later.

For a truly memorable experience that will last well beyond the office visit, try emailing relevant patient education videos to your patients, such as those from Rendia's comprehensive video library. Sharing videos such as "Getting Used to Progressive Lenses" or "How to Clean Your Glasses" via email allows them to review the information on their own time, whenever and wherever they like. Plus, patients will have immediate access to your contact information when they're ready to schedule a follow-up appointment.

While customer service is not a trend, how optical shops are providing it is evolving. Remember: it's in your best interest to deliver the kind of exceptional patient experience that big brands like Warby Parker just aren't able to deliver.

Featured Rendia Videos

Getting Used to Progressive Lenses

WATCH NOW »

Help manage expectations for first-time wearers of progressive lenses. Email home as part of a virtual care package to go along with patients' new eyeglasses.

How to Clean Your Glasses

WATCH NOW »

Explain to patients the correct way to clean eyeglasses for proper care and no smudges. Play in the optical dispensary or on your practice's website to provide patients with useful information that helps drive web traffic.

2

Mastering Millennial Marketing

[THE TREND]

Marketing that Focuses on Hip, Tech-Savvy Consumers

Focusing on hip, tech-savvy consumers has helped New York City eyewear startup Warby Parker earn "well over" $100 million in annual revenue as well as the title of Most Innovative Company of 2015 by *Fast Company*.

Love them or hate them, the company sells directly to consumers online for a fraction of what a similar pair of glasses would cost at a typical optical shop—but it's touches like free shipping, donations to non-profits, and a celebrity-studded social media presence that set the brand apart.

[YOUR STRATEGY]

Capture the same hip, tech-savvy consumers by focusing on the benefits of ***supporting a local business***.

Another word for hip, tech-savvy consumers? Millennials. *Don't underestimate millennials' desire to support local businesses*. This is a demographic that is more likely to notice doctors who are actively contributing to their communities, and many of these consumers would prefer to support a locally-owned small business rather than a faceless multi-national corporation.

A recent *Fortune* poll found that Americans between the ages of 18 and 34 were more likely than their elders to want to work for, buy from, and recommend businesses that contribute to charity. But giving in name only doesn't win this group over; millennials want to see the impact you're making in the community.

Incorporating philanthropic efforts in your overall patient engagement strategy is an easy and very effective way for your practice to ***make a big impact*** *in the local community.*

Dr. Belill playing the Rendia video "*Eye Testing for Preschool Children*" for volunteers and attendees at Children's Vision Day 2017 in Flint, Michigan.

Participating in volunteer efforts that are relevant to your target patients is a great way to give back and an effective way to encourage patient engagement, while positioning yourself as an expert and getting your practice's name out there at the same time. Start small by offering a collection box in your reception area where patients can donate their unneeded or out-of-fashion glasses.

Even being a sponsor for a local charity event or fundraiser puts your practice in a positive light and shows your community what you value. It helps to cast a wide net, like Belill Eye Care in Clio, Michigan. The clinic's charitable giving includes not only health care-related organizations like the Sarcoma Foundation and the American Diabetes Association, but it also sponsors youth sports teams, the local Rotary Club, and the 4th of July fireworks. On a daily basis, the clinic uses Rendia's patient education videos to raise awareness about important eye health issues.

Millennials tend to approach health care like any other consumer transaction—researching doctors online, checking out review sites, and asking for friends' recommendations on Facebook—so don't be afraid to play up the philanthropic side of your business on your website and social media profiles. For some inspiration, check out Belill Eye Care and Snoqualmie Valley Eyecare Associates—two practices that have done a tasteful job of featuring local contributions on their practice website.

The secret to setting yourself apart from the online retail competition is consistently participating in patient-facing, eye care-relevant, hands-on volunteer projects. Leverage your status as a locally-owned small business making a difference in the community, and not only will patients feel good about coming to your practice for their eye care needs—they'll also be sure to spread the word.

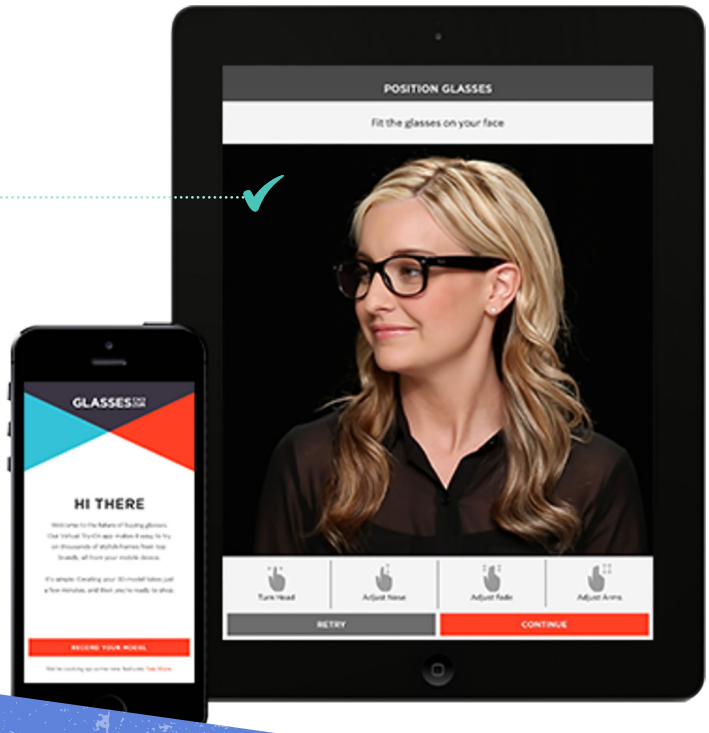
3

Competing with the Convenience of Home Try-On Eyewear Apps

[THE TREND]

Virtual Try-On Technology

Virtual try-on technology, such as the Glasses.com app, allows customers to see what different frames look like on a 3D model of their face. They can either upload a photo of themselves or choose a similar-looking model to try on glasses on a computer screen.

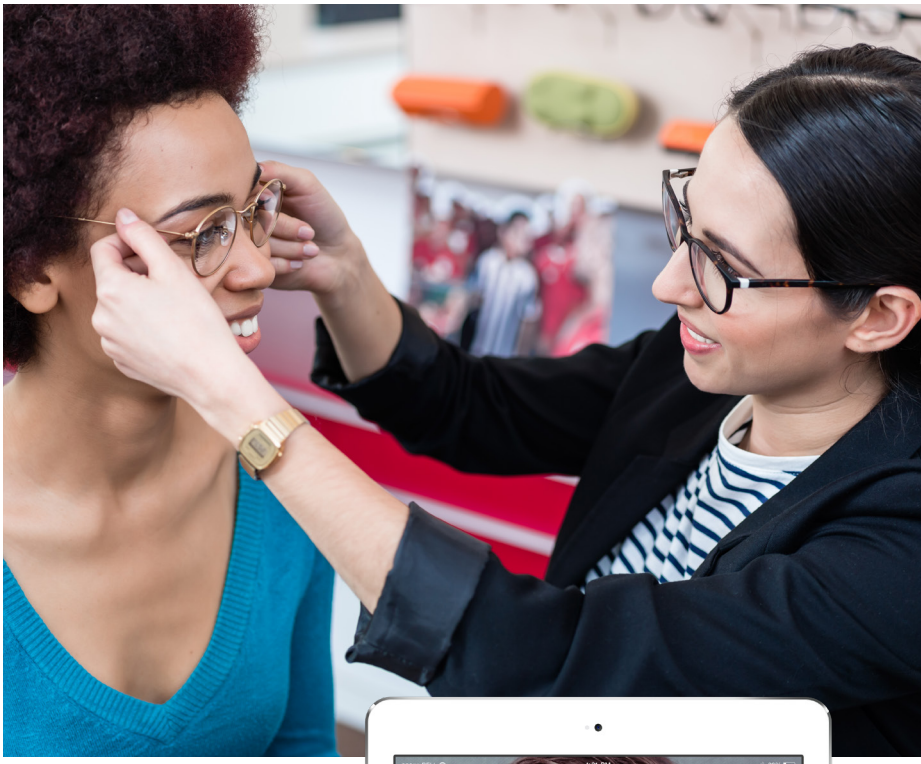


[YOUR STRATEGY]

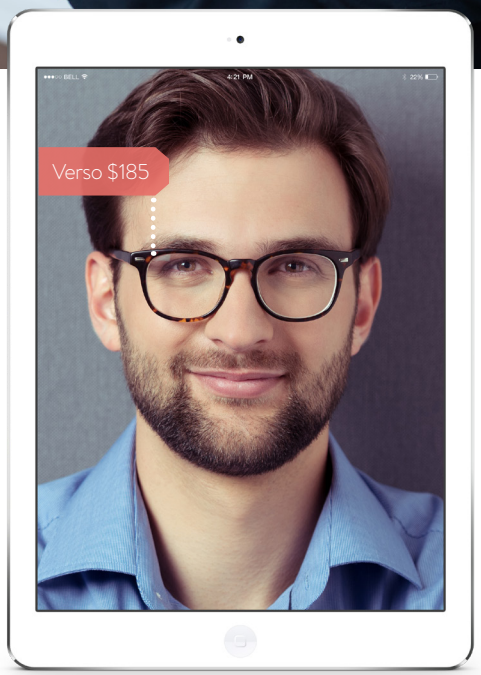
Position your opticians as personal stylists with access to an entire inventory of frames patients can ***try on, in person***.

According to the Vision Council's 2015 VisionWatch Internet Influence Report, only 23 percent of consumers who use the Internet to shop for eyewear actually complete their purchase online. The remaining 77 percent of these consumers claim that the biggest barrier to buying glasses online is they want to be able to try the glasses on in person. This creates a huge opportunity for the opticians at your practice to provide specialized customer service.

Not only can a licensed optician help patients pick out the right frames for their face, they can ***fit the frames to each individual patient on the spot to ensure a proper fit.***



Whether they're making business decisions, supporting your customers, creating your product, or delivering impeccable customer service, opticians (and other patient-facing staff members) are ultimately responsible for demonstrating your practice's expertise to patients. Ensure a truly coherent message along every step of the patient visit by using Rendia videos to train your staff on key selling points—why Trivex is the safest lens material for kids, how exposure to blue light can harm their eyes (and how blue filtering lenses can help), and the benefits of anti-reflective lenses for those selfie-obsessed patients, to name a few.



Armed with this knowledge, opticians can sit with patients to discuss everything from eyewear needs to eye health history to lifestyle behaviors, even down to factors like face shape and eye color. With these considerations in mind, your staff can gather a curated set of options for patients to try on until they find their ideal fit. Patients can't get that from a website—nor can they get follow-up care.

Use this to your advantage by emphasizing your eye care experience to patients and your full stock of frames, in person and in your marketing materials. Let patients know that if anything doesn't feel right after a few days, they can come back and get their glasses adjusted quickly. And to keep patients completely on-site, think about providing iPads equipped with virtual try-on technology to let patients see how they'd look in frames you may not have in stock.

Web-based patient education videos that are easy to understand and share is another smart way to leverage technology. Playing quick videos such as "Glasses For Face Shape" in the waiting area is a subtle yet effective way to remind patients why consulting with an optician is an essential step toward finding the perfect pair of glasses. With hundreds of video options to choose from, Rendia's patient education solution is the perfect way to both entertain patients while they wait and get them excited about lens and frame options they may not have considered before.

Purposefully positioning your opticians as personal stylists will give patients the individualized attention they crave from e-commerce sites like Stitch Fix that tout a hyper-personalized shopping experience. Warby Parker might offer "5 pairs, 5 days, free trial," but your opticians have the power to ensure patients leave with their perfect pair of specs after just one office visit.

*Get patients asking about products and services you offer with the **ultimate video playlist** for your optical dispensary!*

Multiple Pairs of Glasses
Explain how different glasses can match different occasions, like shoes.

Eyeglasses (Smartphone)
Encourage patients to invest in technology that enhances everything they see, every day.

Glasses For Face Shape
Let patients know that your practice offers frame designs to complement every face shape.

Take Better Photos With Glasses
Show patients why they should consider anti-reflective lenses for their next pair of specs.

4

Overcoming the DIY Design Craze

[THE TREND]

DIY Designs and Customized Frames

DIY designs and customized frames are increasingly popular among people who don't want their glasses to look like everyone else's. Companies like Japanese eyewear retailer, JINS, allow customers to design their own frames using an app. According to a recent poll of 1,000 shoppers, as many as 30 percent are interested in purchasing items customized to their own particular taste.

[YOUR STRATEGY]

Make sure patients know that ***accuracy of their glasses prescription*** always trumps personal style.

Sometimes going the completely DIY route doesn't yield the best results for customers, so encourage patients to collaborate with you, an experienced eye care professional, on the customization process.

Patients may not realize that if measurements are even a fraction off, they won't get the best vision results—and it may even harm their eyes. Because while online retailers would have consumers believe that cost is the only difference between buying frames from them versus an optometrist, that's simply not true, warns the *Review of Optometry*.

Studies show that nearly half of all prescription glasses ordered online are inaccurate or ***failed to meet safety standards****.*

According to the AOA, a recent study found that nearly half of all glasses (44.8 percent) ordered online either contained an inaccurate prescription or didn't meet safety standards designed to protect the eyes. Nearly a quarter (23 percent) of the lenses failed impact resistance testing, a major safety issue. Children's glasses performed even worse, with 29 percent failing impact testing.

Explain to patients that pupil distance (PD) determines where to place the center of each lens in their frames to customize them to their eyes, and why it's critical that an experienced eye care professional provide this measurement. Most online retailers highly recommend that an optometrist provide the PD to ensure accuracy, but this measurement is not part of the prescription and not normally provided unless patients ask for it.

Also remind eyeglass wearers that all lenses are not created equal. Discuss the different lens materials, such as traditional plastic, as well as thinner, lighter materials, and explain other considerations, such as non-glare coatings and photochromic lenses.

Ideally, patients can learn these considerations prior to their appointment by watching relevant patient education videos in the reception area or dispensary while they wait.

Free Waiting Room eBook:

One in five patients are actively seeking health information in the reception area before an appointment, giving your practice a huge opportunity to provide purposeful, action-oriented health information while they wait. Make the most of your practice's waiting room with our eBook, *How to Design the Perfect Waiting Room for Patients!*

DOWNLOAD NOW »

Dr. Nicholas Belill, owner of Belill Eye Care in Clio, Michigan (and a Rendia customer) has reported an uptick in optical sales after implementing Rendia's patient education videos on the practice's waiting room screens—a strategy that Dr. Belill claims "has...sparked conversations about scheduling children's eye exams, variable tint lenses, polarized and Drivewear sun lenses." This method has been so successful because, as he describes it, "with the passive approach [of Rendia's waiting room feature], patients are less likely to feel like they are hearing a sales pitch."

Patients need to know that online retailers simply don't measure up when it comes to safety. Accuracy of the prescription, measurements like pupil distance, and type of lens material are all critical considerations that patients simply aren't able to discuss with an eye care professional when buying from a website.

5

Leveling the Playing Field with Online Eye Tests

[THE TREND]

Online Eye Exams

In addition to offering customers a greater selection of eyewear at a lower cost than most brick-and-mortar eye care providers can offer, Warby Parker has given optometrists one more reason to dislike them: *online eye tests*.

[YOUR STRATEGY]

Educate patients on ***the dangers*** of online eye exams.

While online retailers would have consumers believe that an online eye test is similar to an in-person exam by an optometrist, that's simply not true, warns the *Review of Optometry*. Patients need to know that safety is a major concern with online eye exams—because what eye doctors know and patients may not is that an online eye test does not evaluate the health of your eyes.

"An online eye test does not completely cover any one of the 12 components of a regular in-person, comprehensive eye exam." —American Optometric Association

Warby Parker's website states that its new Prescription Check app "isn't meant to replace a comprehensive eye exam." Using a smartphone and another computer, the app guides users through a series of questions and tests that measure refractive error. Then, within 24 hours, "an eye doctor will assess whether your vision has changed since your last prescription. If it hasn't changed, the doctor will write you an updated prescription that you can use anywhere! If it has, the doctor may recommend that you get a comprehensive eye exam."

Patient education is key to communicating the importance of seeing an eye care professional, and using high-quality videos is ideal for this purpose. Sharing videos on your website and social media pages such as "The Importance of Complete Eye Exams" and "Don't Buy Cheaters! Get Readers From Us" is an easy and powerful way to educate prospective patients on why an appointment with a certified eye care provider is necessary.

By taking the time to listen to patients and educate them, you will show them that there are some things a trusted eye care professional can provide that online retailers and apps can't. Then, once patients are in the door, using interactive consultation tools like Exam Mode takes only a minute but helps patients understand you offer an experience that no online test can match.

Featured Rendia Videos

The Importance of Complete Eye Exams

WATCH NOW »

Remind patients that caring for their eyesight begins with complete eye examinations by an eye care professional. Share on your website and social media profiles.

Don't Buy Cheaters! Get Readers from Us

WATCH NOW »

Discourage patients from buying over-the-counter reading glasses and help them understand why they should only buy from an eye care professional. Send to patients through an email newsletter.

[Final Takeaway] **Focus on What You Can Provide** That Online Retailers Can't

Taking the time to provide top-notch customer service, educate patients, and form an ongoing relationship between patients and a trusted eye care provider are strategies that will never be impacted by trends.

About Rendia

Rendia is educational software that blends stunning clinical artwork with interactive technology to help medical professionals and patients understand each other better. By bridging the communication gap between doctors and patients, Rendia empowers patients to make informed health decisions and experience better outcomes.

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Schedule a Demo:

From progressive lenses to dry eye to vitreous floaters, Rendia's comprehensive video library contains hundreds of videos to help your patients understand their eye health.

SCHEDULE A DEMO with us today to see optical videos, plus other eye health topics!

SIGN UP NOW »