

opt

MAGAZINE

WINTER 2018
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Hell's Optical

DO YOU HAVE AN OPTICAL NIGHTMARE?

QUALITY LABS

LUXURY, LENSES, & LABS

QUALITY OF CARE

GOOD CHEFS + BAD SERVICE = NO CUSTOMERS

PROFESSIONAL CHEESE

ARTISAN QUALITY VERSUS MASS-PRODUCED CRAP

ALSO INSIDE: QUALITY Lens Designs

QUALITY Online

QUALITY Photochromics

FAKE Quality and much more!



LETTER from the EDITOR

One of the things that it's easy to lose sight of in today's industry is what 'quality' actually means. And when I say that, I'm referring to it from a few different angles. It's difficult enough for people that are actually in the industry to know what is "good quality" and what is "bad quality". Whether it's a frame, a lens material, a free-form design, or whatever else, what kind of baseline do we, as professionals, have for determining whether or not something is actually "new and improved" or just yesterday's leftovers in a new box? Other than taking a salesman's word for it, we don't. Everything always gets more expensive, and there are always more fancy terms that are thrown around, and it gets more and more difficult to be easily able to tell the difference between all of the possible products that are available today. If we consider how difficult it can be to stay well-informed as a professional - what hope does a consumer have at grasping the difference in quality?

All a consumer sees is what's on the plate - and the plate today is really big, thanks to the internet. We have no good reason to expect the majority of consumers to know how we 'see' quality in products - all they can see is the cost. There isn't an easy way for them to put a 'low quality' pair of eyewear next to a 'high quality' pair of eyewear and be able to tell what the difference between the two is. This was the whole concept behind our 'food' motif - it's easy for someone to just look at a 'low quality' hamburger and a 'high quality' hamburger and see a difference. And you can get fairly immediate confirmation on how good each one is after the first bite. That's not so with eyewear. Usually the only bite that the consumer feels is what they pay for it, and they don't understand what benefits they are paying for, because they aren't immediate. Since they don't get the immediate gratification that they do with food, we need to be the educators for them. Sure, what you sell them may work better, and give them better performance, but it's hard to equate. If I get fewer headaches in a few months because the lenses you sold me reduced my eye strain, how likely am I to even notice, let alone give credit to my eyewear? This is why it's important to ensure that when you offer quality that the customer can see it and really know that what they are getting is "Grade A".

— Bill Heffner, IV
Editor OPT Magazine

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Professional Cheese

Why settle for a big bland block of blah that will constipate the senses?

PROFESSIONAL CHEESE

- BE PREMIUM -
NOT PEDESTRIAN



SO last summer, I drove out to Wisconsin to do a photoshoot at a sports car race. When I originally pitched the idea to my significant other, I had a few things in mind for what to see and do out there, but decided to let her take the reins on choosing things to do beyond our time at the track. Of course, she immediately honed in on the cheese aspect (as Wisconsin is known for their dairy products) and wanted to do cheese sampling. Sure, I'm up for it. I like cheese. Even if I were lactose intolerant, I'd still indulge. After all, I just drove 1000 miles to get there so I wanted to capitalize on where I was and take in some of the local offerings. My mindset is typically, as they say, 'when in Rome...'

— by Muenster Meister

MMM—MMM—MMM! THAT'S GOUDA!

Let me just begin by stating for the record, that I have never had a sausage, egg, and cheese on a croissant from Dunkin' Donuts that tasted sooooo good as the one I had out there. It was the richest, creamiest, melt-in-your-mouth, probably shouldn't be driving at that moment, breakfast sandwich that I have ever had. Everything about it was of a different caliber and quality than what is made available here on the east coast. Mind you, this was only at a pit stop in Illinois (just south of Wisconsin) but it was close enough to Wisconsin to give me my first impression of the quality of the cheese and dairy in the region and, let me just say, it did not disappoint.

Now I don't really know what the logistics are for Dunkin' (nor do I really care but a long car ride certainly lets the mind wander), so I'm going to assume, based on my impromptu taste-test, that their product supply chain in the midwest is regional enough to be considered local-ish for where I stopped at. I will say with a lot of confidence that everything in my sandwich was significantly fresher than what we typically get around here in the Philadelphia region. It also felt like it was prepared with a little more care, which I really liked, as I felt like a customer there and not a 'bother'.

That said, volume should never be an excuse for marginal quality or service. With the benefit of the doubt given here, I imagine that it's because of the sheer volume and demand we have here on the east coast (based on population density). It is also evident that the staff around here appears significantly more agitated because of the volume and look to just serve the customer as quickly as possible so as to move onto the next one (*turn-and-burn*). Not a great impression by a business, nor a good business model if that's the tactic.

Supplies are also likely manufactured in mass quantity for the same *turn-and-burn* system of delivery to the customer, and stored in warehouses similar to what you see at the end of the first Indiana Jones movie.

With that thought now fresh in your mind, and to think a little more on it, for such a large volume to be manufactured, you know that there are all sorts of wonderful preservatives and other 'fake crap' that goes into mass produced cheese... and who knows how many corners were cut in the manufacturing, distribution, storage, and delivery process. Trust me. Don't think on it too hard as you may ruin a few things for yourself if you do overthink it. This experience and analysis, however, has led me to draw a few parallels to design, businesses and aspects of business, with the use of cheese. Big surprise here, right?

PROFESSIONAL CHEESE

I adopted the term Professional Cheese a number of years ago as it was spawned from management wanting something executed or created in a quick, simple and basic manner from me, but with an added element that they knew I brought to the table. When I use this term 'professional cheese', it is usually in describing my approach to a design concept. In this specific context, I am referring to a higher quality and higher standard applied to a design whose subject, at its very core, is still rather pedestrian. In short, it's the process of making it 'gooder'.

Based on my analysis over the past 2 years of the design solutions that I see in the optical industry, I would label them as 'cheesy'. That is my professional opinion. Why? Because they all look the same using this similarly posed style of imagery that I see being constantly regurgitated through the field. Professional Cheese is simply a means to take something that is garden-variety to the next level. Regardless of how boring or mundane the topic or item is, it can be delivered in a way that doesn't look like everything else out there. It doesn't look like it was mass-produced from a turn-and-burn system of design and has something just a little different and a little more added to it. It makes it unique and special and provides a bit of separation from the rest.

continued >>>

VOLUME SHOULD NEVER BE AN EXCUSE
FOR MARGINAL QUALITY

Take, for example, opt magazine and compare it to all the other optical magazines out there. It would probably be fair and more accurate to categorize opt as a hybrid graphic novel-periodical but at its core (and for this particular point), it is a magazine. Sure, one of the big and immediate differences you will spot as you flip through the pages is the lack of advertisements that opt has. In fact, the only frame ad we do is a mock ad, just to have some fun at all the other magazines having more frame ads than actual, meaningful content; they are almost like glorified frame catalogs. Beyond the lack of frame ads though, you should notice that the presentation of articles and magazine as a whole, is different than what you see in the other trade magazines and I am fortunate enough to work with it. A big philosophy behind opt is that we value meaningful content above all else, and as a service to our customers, provide them with in-depth knowledge and insight. We strive to make the mundane fun and entertaining.

For a bit of a deeper-dive into the vat, just look at the article on Dispensing Eyewear on page 36. How many other magazines (and even blogs) will have the same or similar articles talking about the do's and don'ts and what to look for, in regards to dispensing eyewear? How many of those articles will also feature an image of a smiling person getting eyeglasses put on their face? This is the 'fake crap' that drives me nuts as a designer when I see this. This manufactured, mass produced, let's go with the same 'ol, default, first-thing that comes-to-mind idea and run with it type-of-approach because it's simple, safe, and makes sense. NO. It sucks and looks boring and I have less than zero interest in reading it. This is why I will look to add a bit of an artisan's approach to any design that I do.

ARTISAN ★ QUALITY

Yes. There is a bit of an artisan in me that I look to put forth in anything I do in design. I guess it goes back to my education and training that began well over a decade before computers started to get involved with the world of design. There is a quality and a standard inserted into my work that matches my passion and enthusiasm for what I do. I do also have a bit of a purist's approach (if you will) which some might say it is a 'lost art' these days. I also know that it is not for everyone in this day and age. There



is certainly something to be said, however, for something being hand crafted and I, for one, appreciate this attention to detail and skillsets in design and beyond. Unfortunately, even the term '*hand crafted*' has lost some value these days because it is grossly over-used in marketing as a gimmick to try and get people to believe that it is actually quality from a bygone era.

Is there an artisan quality and approach in your business? I'm not just asking specifically about the way your business is presented visually on the internet or in marketing pieces. I'm also asking about your business as a whole. From your businesses presence online, all the way down to dispensing and even further down

to a follow-up with your customers. Does your business encompass the time, care, attention and even craft, which separates it from the others and gives the service you offer, that personal touch, as can only be done by an artisan?

Sometimes I yearn for the days when you had a master and an apprentice, as it pertains to a craft. The way of providing those goods and services to loyal customers, used to be. The focus and training was always 100% on the craft and the quality of the results were evident of that focus. Nowadays, multitasking and mediocrity appear to have replaced skill and pride. It makes no sense to me as to why there is such an accepted level of

compromise these days. It certainly makes no sense why the owner's 16 year old nephew, who randomly plays in Photoshop (and is paid with an Xbox gift card), is perceived as 'the right choice' for the marketing of the business.

Why settle for this basic cheese? Why use the same cheese that everyone else is using? For example - I'll stack my grandmother's mac n' cheese recipe that uses Cooper Sharp, against **ANY** mac n' cheese made with Velveeta® or from the blue box by Kraft, any day of the week. The end results are that yes, they are all mac n' cheese, but only one of them has a little something different to it, professional cheese. It's a little extra effort to find this particular cheese and it's a little extra effort to prepare the dish but the results are markedly greater.

HONEST AND WHOLESOME

Let's be honest for a moment. Can you really make the act of dispensing eyewear sound better than what it is? I don't wear glasses and have no frame of reference (pun unintended) and may be a tad ignorant here but, is the act of dispensing eyewear actually exciting? Do you get all amped-up like players before a rivalry football game? Are you walking around the office high-fiving and giving the cliché fist-bumps and 'sports-guy chest bumps' with your staff after dispensing? Love the enthusiasm but highly doubtful, especially since that would probably be considered inappropriate and, most likely, an HR issue in the workplace.

Don't get me wrong, I know that there are some of you out there that really do enjoy customer service. Aside from those individuals that truly enjoy making customers happy and providing a great experience for the consumer, how thrilling and edge-of-your-seat action is the act of dispensing? Again, be honest. I'm not ripping on those doing the dispensing here, as I am appreciative of those who care so much about their job and who will take it up a notch; I'm simply ripping on the solutions I see by those that visually communicate an article about it. Done the same way that everyone else does, and repeating this mind-numbing, monotonous solution. This again, is what I call 'cheese' in design. A big bland block of blah that will constipate the senses of the consumers. *continued >>>*

WHY SETTLE FOR A BIG BLAND BLOCK OF BLAH
THAT WILL CONSTIPATE THE SENSES?

WHY IS THERE AN ACCEPTED LEVEL
OF COMPROMISE THESE DAYS?

Cheese certainly has its place, though. Late night infomercials come to mind. Filler TV shows whose writers can only write scripts based on current trends that top Google searches yield. Pictures of cats wearing glasses on Instagram. People eat this stuff up and clearly it’s successful... to a point. Me? I really don’t get it. I’m simply not wired for that stuff... but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t have its place. If I am asked to make something that falls into the category of cheese, I always look to try and take it to the next level... professional cheese. Even if they just want plain old cheese. That’s how I’m wired and is my approach with many things within design and beyond. I have a habit of one-upping myself as I view anything I did yesterday as crap. Always forward thinking.

CHEESE **IS** CHEESE... OR **IS** IT?

What kind of cheese do you want? What kind of cheese do you like? These are questions that you need to ask yourself as it pertains to your marketing, advertising and, really, all aspects of your business. Maybe you like cheddar cheese on your hamburger. Great. Millions of other people across this country do too. For many, it’s a classic and not to be tampered with. After all, there are plenty of franchises out there that are extremely successful, distributing mass quantities of burgers on a daily basis using this familiar slice of orange cheese. But just because you like cheddar on your burger, doesn’t mean all your customers do.

Are you happy with a slab or hunk from the same old block of cheese, simply because it’s cheap, safe, and everyone is familiar with it? If you are comfortable with your business, goods, and services just blending-in and going-on with the status quo firmly in place, then that’s fine. Nothing wrong with that at all (said genuinely, regardless of my snarky tone). If you, however, are looking to try something different, then I say *have at it* and *give it a go*. How about some Pepper Jack? Blue Cheese? or Smoked Gouda on your burger? When you try one of these alternative

cheeses on your burger, it now moves that burger into the ‘gourmet’ category and gives it an elevated status. Wouldn’t you like your business to have that? Sure, you will have your customer base keep coming back for a burger with cheddar, but a gourmet burger brings a whole new crowd. Why can’t you offer both?

Sadly, not all cheese is created equal. Not all cheese is for everyone. Not all cheese plays nicely with certain dishes or combinations. Case in point, back in Wisconsin, we decided to stop in Milwaukee on one day (highly recommended btw) and do, amongst other touristy things, cheese tasting. So we went to this 5-star boutique cheese and chocolate shop and ordered up a sampler. You might be taken aback by the pairing of chocolate and cheese; you are correct in that presumption. The cheese was phenomenal on its own, as was the chocolate on its own. Together though, not so much. Chocolate and peanut butter together on the other hand... now that’s a winner (sorry, that idea’s been taken), but I digress...

Ok, so trying some pro-grade cheese and pro-grade chocolate together in the land of dairy didn’t really work for us and that’s fine. We tried it. We survived it. We moved on from it. The same can be said for you and your business and trying some new cheese. It can take time to find the right combination that works and when it does, it’s amazing. We did come across some magnificent cheese by the way, in the form of cheese curds and a dipping sauce. OMG, is all I’m able to say about that without being censored by my editor.

Even though these are all cheeses spoken about here, each one offers something different and unique. Make no mistake, some cheeses will be wrong. The question to really ask yourself is, do you consider your business and what you offer your customers, to be more of the artisan-quality cheese or the manufactured-processed quality of cheese? Which would you rather have? Which would you rather serve your customers? Which would you want to represent the quality of your products & your business?

AGED **AND** MATURED

Many things get better with age. Ingredients, time, patience, craft, and attention to detail... all of these are elements of what makes for good cheese, if done properly of course. The same could be said for your business. Your business should be getting better with age. Core elements and techniques that long ago established your business should still be evident, in practice and in spirit too, in addition to providing new offerings. Not just the same big bland block of blah.

Careful though. Just because you need to let something age and mature, doesn’t mean you become complacent and forget about it for a period of time. You’ll end up with the ‘wrong’ type of Blue Cheese if you do. It is a fine and delicate balance that you need to learn. Too much attention, smothering and/or micromanagement can lead to negative consequences. The same can be said for too much neglect or outright abandonment. Ever make Alfredo cheese sauce and forget it on the stove? Tastes wonderful, doesn’t it?

When it comes down to it, aged, matured and well-crafted cheese ultimately wins out always over fast, mass-produced cheese. Fresh, young eyes are good for some things as it pertains to a business, but the impatience and lack of experience can lead to shortcomings. On the flip-side, aged cheese can be really stubborn and not play well with others. Learn to listen to your employees and your customers. They will help strike the balance for a great product. Be both the artisan and the connoisseur of your business and then “*everything else is cream cheese*”. ⚙

RECIPE **FOR** PRO-CHEESE

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- ✓ 3 cups communication
- ✓ 2 cups of ideas
- ✓ 8 ounces of layout
- ✓ 2 tbsp white space
- ✓ 4 tbsp typography
- ✓ a dash of color
- ✓ a pinch of innovation
- ✓ 1 whole, aged & matured professional designer
- ✓ NO SUBSTITUTIONS ALLOWED

WHAT TO DO

1. talk with the professional designer
2. brainstorm and gather ideas together
3. mix all of the ingredients together
4. let the design be worked for the time specified by the designer – *this is important as it is not on your terms and will not happen in a day*
5. sample, evaluate, and adjust to taste*
** if it’s not good, have the designer adjust ingredients*
6. re-sample, re-evaluate, and further adjust to perfection

REMEMBER... PREMIUM,
NOT PEDESTRIAN



quality

PHOTOCHROMICS

— Graham Elliot

Waiting for water to boil ranks right up there with the other great time-wasters of our lives. Watching paint dry, watching grass grow, and so on. It is, unfortunately, one of those necessary evils that we need to endure. This is usually less of a problem with proper timing and planning, but many people don't necessarily cook that way.

Some people, without naming any names, will often get to that critical point in the preparation where they suddenly realize that, "Oh crap, I should have put water on fifteen minutes ago." Then comes the futile hope that somehow if we explain to the water exactly how slow and stupid it is, that it will somehow boil faster and we can get the meal back on schedule. Unfortunately, that hasn't seemed to work yet. So I'm told by those people that do that thing. People that are definitely not me. At any rate, in these situations, it's always great to think how nice it would be to have something that could make that stupid water boil twice as fast. It taking forever to boil does me no good - I don't need it "almost boiled" or "halfway boiled". It needs to be all the way there. I don't need some kind of gradual buildup of anticipation - I just need it done.

This ends up being much like how photochromic lenses behave. I don't know about you, but in all the reviews and feedback that I've gotten about a whole range of lenses, the following is most definitely NOT one I've ever heard:

"I absolutely loved my new lenses. It's not that they got dark - oh, no. It's the WAY they got dark. It was a completely new experience - the way they kept getting a little darker, and then darker still. A total kaleidoscopic journey of chromatic bliss, I can't say that I've ever this kind of experience with a lens where it took my eyes on that kind of rollercoaster of a ride. Well, one of those rollercoasters where they aren't particularly fast, at least.

I can't even begin to express exactly how excited I was when I went back indoors. It was so exciting! At first, it was so dark that I couldn't tell what was going on. Then, after I picked myself up from the floor, it was like a whole new (but very dark) world was coming into focus in front of me. I even saw a few people looking at me, probably jealous that their lenses didn't take as long to get clear as mine. Too bad for them, but I paid enough for this lens that I deserve it to take as long as possible to get clear."

While this is, obviously, ridiculous, it isn't necessarily completely divorced from the truth. There are plenty of people that prefer to pay more for lenses that take twice as long to change from dark to clear. Unless you plan on making that an 'added benefit', like mentioned above, then maybe it's time to look for a better quality photochromic that does its job - changing color as fast as possible. ⚙️

it's about time

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PHOTOCHROMICS



Hell's Optical

DO YOU HAVE AN OPTICAL NIGHTMARE?

— Gordon Ramsey

Gordon strode through the front door just before noon. The first thing that he noticed was the unmistakable odor of tuna. This was not the welcome scent of a freshly seared sesame-crusted tuna steak. Of course it wasn't. Rather, the stench that was currently assailing his nostrils was more of the canned variety. Perhaps even the canned and then left out in the sun for a week variety. It was hard to ignore, especially when it was the first thing that greeted him through the door.

Unfortunately, even when the rest of his senses caught up with Gordon's sense of smell, he had no further greeting from anyone - or anything-else. The front desk was unmanned, and the reception area empty, save for Gordon and the lingering stench. If it weren't for the fact that the lights were on and the door unlocked, he would have thought he came on a day they were closed.

Gordon tossed out a single word, almost trying to see if it would be able to make any progress through the sheer magnitude of the permeating miasma of tuna, "Hello?"

Almost immediately, the sound of a chair scraping and footsteps rang out, and a short, yet round man seemed to almost pull himself around the door frame behind the reception desk. "Can't you read?" the man made a gesture towards the front door, but Gordon wasn't exactly sure to what, "I'm sorry?"

"We are closed from noon to one for lunch. You'll have to come back."

"It's 11:45?" Gordon hadn't intended for this to sound like a question, but it most certainly did. He was having a hard time processing exactly what the heck was going on, and whether or not someone else was hiding in the back of the office, having a really good laugh at his expense.

The man in the doorway made an audible harumph and picked up a small clock from the desk in front of him, "It's eleven *FIFTY* one," he said, stressing the way he said fifty in some apparently effort to make it sound like that mere act of pronunciation made him more justified. "You'll have to come back after one o'clock."

◀ Meet Bob. Bob is gonna make his *famous* Tuna-Chum Stew for you 'cause he knows whats best for you.

The little man turned and the the door behind the desk clicked shut before Gordon could say another word. He just stood there for several long moments, trying to find at least some kind of justification - some kind of confluence of events - that even began to explain exactly what just happened. Just then he heard two voices in the hallway coming towards him.

The voices stopped abruptly as the two women that were conversing entered the main reception area and they saw Gordon standing there, looking a little bewildered. "Gordon, you're here!" the taller one of them exclaimed, apparently already knowing who he was and why he was there. Her excitement was short-lived, however, "Oh, crap. Did you just meet Bob?" Gordon took a moment to process everything so far. "If Bob was the cheerful gentleman in the little office there, then yes, I believe I have had the distinct pleasure." Gordon tried to smile, and brush off his near-Bob experience. "I think I have an idea already of why I'm here. But I think I need to see how you do things. First things first, however, which one of you is in charge?" Both of the women looked at him for a long, quiet moment, before both sets of eyes wandered over to the door behind the desk. "Bloody hell." Gordon whispered to himself, "Let's get to work then."

THE F-WORD

Later that afternoon - after one o'clock - it was time to get down to business. Gordon wanted to see first hand how this optical shop functioned, so what better way to see that than pick out a pair of eyewear for himself? Michelle, the slightly taller woman that had greeted him initially, typed a code into a door lock and opened a door off of the waiting room, revealing where all of their frames were displayed. "Why are they all locked up back here where people can't easily browse what you have?" Gordon asked, starting to look around the room. "Oh, Bob doesn't like that. He doesn't want anything to go missing." She seemed to recite the answer in a way that she knew what Gordon was going to ask next, "Is that a big problem you have here?" She shook her head, "No, never." She walked across the room and sat behind a small table that had a mirror on it. "Go ahead and pick something out, just let me know when you are ready." Gordon paused a moment. "You mean you aren't going to suggest anything?" She shook her head again, "Oh no, the customer has to pick out what they want, we don't want to be pushy. Bob doesn't like that." Gordon pursed his lips, then decided to just continue looking around at what frames they had to offer. He was already sensing a pattern here. "You have a very...interesting frame selection," he was picking through some of the more hideous styles, trying to figure out who would ever make some of these, "Oh, they are mostly close-out frames, or discontinued styles. Bob says they are too expensive otherwise," was the answer that Gordon received from across the room. I'm not surprised, he thought to himself, inspecting a sign that said Hand-Made Eyewear, and wondering what frames the signs was supposed to be describing. "Does Bob actually sell these?" Gordon asked as if he didn't already know what the answer was, "No, he mostly stays in his office," she paused a moment, then added, "if we are lucky."

PLAYING WITH FIRE

As Gordon spent a little bit of time trying to figure out exactly what kind of logic was behind how the frames in the store were arranged, a customer came in. He went to discuss something with Michelle, which Gordon wasn't exactly paying too much attention to at first, but quickly got very interested in. "Since my son doesn't need glasses, can I just use his insurance benefit to get a pair of sunglasses for myself?" Not that Gordon hadn't heard this before, of course, people tried it all the time. He'd done his fair share of explaining about this many times before. That is probably the most likely reason Gordon did a double-take when he heard the words, "Of course, sir!" come out of her mouth. He was taken aback, but quickly waved her over to him, "I'm sorry to interrupt, but did you just..." he paused, and took a breath, "...can we have a word for a moment?"

A moment later, they were in a small office. Gordon turned to her as the door closed, "You know that's insurance fraud, right?" She seemed surprised, "But Bob said..." He cut her off, "I don't give a damn what Bob might have said - you can't do that. I'm here to fix things, and you need to listen. Doing things like that is not only bad news for your business, but it's bad news for you." He knew it wasn't really her fault, but she needed to understand that some things here were serious. "But..." she started, but he didn't let her finish. "It's fraud. It's BLOODY LAW. Do you get that? Not just questionable, but straight up fraud. So you need to go out there, and explain nicely to that gentleman that no, you won't help him do anything illegal." She still seemed to hesitate, until Gordon added, "I think it's time I speak with Bob."

JUST DESSERTS

Gordon knocked on the door to the office, then stood back and crossed his arms, waiting for a response. After hearing the scraping of a chair on the floor, and a few labored steps, the door opened. "You again?" Bob greeted Gordon, "What do you want." Gordon held himself back. He wanted to at least get through an initial explanation before telling this person exactly what kind of an idiot he really is. "I'm Gordon - your staff asked me to come here because your business needs help. I've only been here a few hours, and there is A LOT of things that you need to change if you want to actually be successful." Bob looked flustered, obviously not used to being told that he was wrong. "Now, see here, I am very successful," Gordon broke in, "No, you're an idiot, and you need to fix what you're doing right now. If you were successful, I wouldn't be here. I've already seen things here that should get you shut down, if not in court as well. So maybe you should just back off and listen to the guy that knows what the hell he's doing."

That seemed to do the trick. Bob seemed to back down, though Gordon wasn't sure if it was because he agreed he needed help, or didn't think he'd get called out on his less-than-ethical practices. "Good. Now that I have your attention, maybe we can do some real work?"



QUALITY LENS DESIGNS

Many people enjoy a good steak. Generally, however, they don't want to know the details of how it goes from cow to plate - they just want it to be the best steak they've ever had. How do you know if the steak is any good? Well, you have a number of criteria - taste, texture, and smell to name a few.

When it comes to a lens design, however, it becomes much more difficult to figure out when you've gotten a "prime cut" and when you've gotten the meat department closeout *not-technically-expired* special.

The ophthalmic lens industry has a wide range of designs and lenses available - I'm sure you've heard of quite a number of them. The quality of all of these lens products can vary significantly, however, as their underlying technology used in calculation and production can be vastly different.

In the days before freeform technology, conventional progressive lens designs were made by creating a mold with the design in it. The lens material was then added to the mold to for the design on the front. Since this is a costly process, lens manufacturers only make a limited set of these designs. This is why they tend to

have more limited availability in a given base curve, material, or inset. This is like going and getting a steak from a supermarket. You get to choose whatever cuts they preselect for you. If it's not quite right, you deal with it. Freeform, on the other hand, lets you get the exact cut of meat you want. You can have any combination of add power, base curve, material, inset, corridor length, etc. Every lens surface can be customized to the specific prescription, increasing the possibilities of what can be created with traditional spherical lens blanks.

So, let's assume that you go to the effort and expense of getting ahold of a piece of top-tier steak. Whatever your 'ideal cut' is - we start with that. That's our lens design - an ideal, perfect representation of what a lens (or a steak) should be. However, before you can actually sit down and enjoy it, you still have to make it. A steak has to be cooked, and a lens has to be made.


Everything we do in those processes are going to affect the final outcome. For lenses, the final result is going to depend not only on the calculation technology used for the design in the first place, but also the production quality of the lab that is used to make the lens. If the lab doesn't have a stable or well-tuned process, they aren't going to be able to accurately produce the lens design the way it was intended to. Just like if you have a cold spot on the grill and a chef that doesn't really understand what they are doing, you end up with a steak where one end is burnt to a crisp and the other end is still cold. The lab (or chef) is going to be the deciding factor in how close to 'ideal' your final product ends up being. It's also why you need good calculation technology to begin with. If you start with cheap steak, then your final product is only ever going to be mediocre, at best. There's no possible way to cook it and have it be 'the best ever'. The same with lens designs - no matter how good the lab is, an inferior design will always be inferior, even if you cover it in barbeque sauce (or ketchup, if you're one of THOSE people).

As we're talking about steak, there's plenty of different ways to get steak - T-Bone, Porterhouse, Sirloin, etc. Everyone has a different favorite, as people have different preferences. When you are dealing with an older, molded progressive lens, you don't get that option. You can't pick the kind you want - you get it the way it is, and that's it. If it's not quite right, there's nothing that you can really do to change it. With a freeform lens, however, it's possible to customize each order to individual parameters to give the patient better visual performance when compared to older, conventional lenses. Personalized lenses use a digital model of how the eye moves to calculate the actual power the wearer perceives. This means that the lens can be better optimized to give the needed power across more of the lens surface.

With this kind of personalization, there are two things that are corrected: how light rays reach the eye, and how the lens is tilted when the patient is wearing it. When creating a lens design with these factors in mind, it is possible to enhance the visual performance of the lens. A reduced level of unwanted astigmatism helps to give a superior performance to personalized lenses. This is a lot like if you can choose what kind of steak you want and specify how you want it cooked. You're going to enjoy it much more than if you just get served a steak the way that the cook likes it. By using personalized lens parameters, the intermediate and near visual areas of a lens design can be increased by about 30%. These improvements in the lenses have been shown to be preferred by wearers in clinical studies. The results are even more apparent to the wearer in higher wrap frames, where the compensation is even more pronounced.

When it comes to progressive lenses, you are going to have an even greater need for having more options to customize the lens design. While having a single generic choice can provide good overall performance, being able to have a family of designs that allow you to choose, based on lifestyle, will give you better results. This means that you can have a design that balances the near and distance to give a good "all purpose" lens, but also have separate designs that focus on the distance viewing area, or ones that focus on the near viewing area. This makes it possible to better match the strengths of a lens design to the daily vision needs of the person that's wearing the lens. All of these lenses still have good 'all around' performance, and can all be used for daily wear, they each offer an edge in their area of focus. So the distance-focused lens would be a better choice for someone that drives a lot, or for sunwear. Conversely, a near-focused lens isn't a "computer lens" in this context, but still an all-purpose progressive design that gives an edge to those that do a higher-than-usual amount of reading or use of digital devices.

While being able to do all of these great things with lenses sound good, at the end of the day it comes down to the laboratory producing the product. Even if a lens is calculated perfectly, how good the final product is can never be better than the capabilities of the lab making it. Put another way, even if you have the best steak in the world, you aren't going to get a good result if the chef doesn't know what they are doing and burns it to death.

As the laboratory is now manufacturing the complex surface on the back of the lens and creating the entire lens design from scratch, there are many more factors that go into making sure the design is correct. It isn't just a matter of verifying the ANSI standard of distance and near power, and that's it. In order to ensure the lens is correct requires validating the entire surface of the lens, not just those two points. This requires more advanced lens mapping machinery, which allows a comparison between the "ideal" and the "manufactured" surface of the lens. In order to ensure that you receive a quality product you need to ensure that your entire lens design is correct, as the patient is certainly going to be looking through the lens in more than just the one spot checked in a lensometer. Freeform lens processing gives a much higher degree of flexibility in what lenses can be created, but is only one ingredient in a successful result. You need to be able to trust that your lab has the capability to cook you up the kind of lens that you and your customer deserve. 

— Mick Dundee





Quality vs Price

Are you really getting what you paid for?

— Betty Crocker

One of the major points of high-end food tends to be its presentation. After you get to a certain point, there's no real way to make the food actually taste better, so other things are done to make it seem more appealing, even though these efforts on presentation have no affect on the taste of the final product. So here, the customer ends up paying more for getting a better show and presentation, but not really much better in terms of the actual dish.

This type of thing happens because we have this false assumption that the more expensive that something is, the better it is. While this can be true up to a point, there is a plateau at which there really isn't any way to get a better quality out of what you are making. For example, if you have the same ingredients that go into a dish, and two different chefs prepare it perfectly, what do they do in order to get you to come to their restaurant? One of them may decide to go for a fancy presentation, while the other may decide that the food doesn't need the extra presentation. The one with the fancy presentation is going to cost more, since truffles don't simply grate themselves. Ultimately, however, you end up with two perfectly good dishes at different price points. One may give you one big slice of cake, while the other may take the same slice, but cut it up into tiny pieces arranged on the plate with a little swirl of chocolate sauce around it. Everyone has their own preference, and sometimes people will pay extra for the presentation because they like it.

You see a similar thing when it comes to lenses - many places have the same input, same machines, and same processes, yet some charge way less than others. This happens not because there is something 'wrong' with the lenses that cost less, rather it is because they are usually not adding extra 'fluff' in their presentation. When we're talking about a special dinner out, this extra fluff can be a nice touch. When we are talking about cost-effective products for your business, however, the cost of the extra fluff can really add up quickly. In these situations where the bottom line is important, it's necessary to ensure that you're really getting as much cake as possible for your dollar. This isn't

about going in and buying all the day-old, stale product that nobody wants just because it's cheap. The important thing to stress here is not that you settle for a lower standard of product, but that you consistently get what you need without all the extras that you would otherwise pay for with a higher price point.

The major reason for a perceived 'lack of quality' at lower price points can often be because those with a higher price point are going to tout how much better they are as a matter of course. They have to be better, otherwise the higher price doesn't seem justified. So, either they need to be seen as 'better', or the guy with the lower price has to be 'worse' or something has to be 'wrong' with whatever he is selling. That's how it goes in any business. If the guy that was more expensive came out and said "Our product is the same as the other guy - but our sales rep buys you cake (or bagels, donuts, etc.) every six months, so that's why we charge 40% more," then you probably wouldn't buy their products. You can buy a lot of cake with the difference in price, and you can make sure you get the kind you actually like that way, as well. As nice as that personal experience is of getting that cake delivered, however, you need to decide if that's actually worth the cost from a business perspective, and not a personal one. What you need to decide, the next time you have a piece of metaphorical cake for your business (like regular cake, just non-existent and zero calories), is whether you get anything out of paying extra for one piece that gets delivered to you on a silver platter, or if you'd just rather go to the bakery and get a whole cake for the same price.



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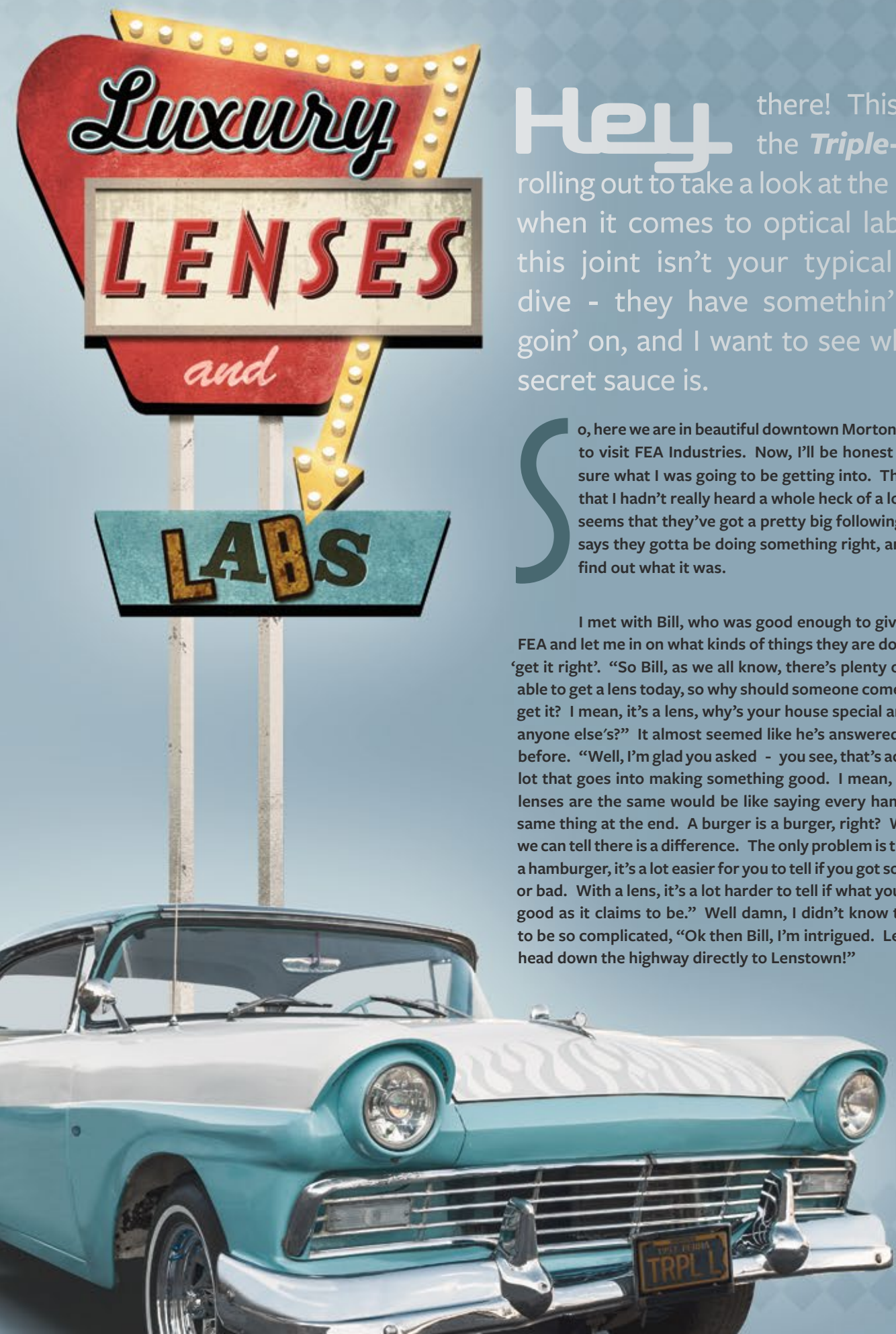
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Hey there! This time on the *Triple-L* we're rolling out to take a look at the real deal when it comes to optical labs. Now, this joint isn't your typical optical dive - they have somethin' special goin' on, and I want to see what their secret sauce is.

So, here we are in beautiful downtown Morton, Pennsylvania to visit FEA Industries. Now, I'll be honest here, I wasn't sure what I was going to be getting into. This was a place that I hadn't really heard a whole heck of a lot about, but it seems that they've got a pretty big following. To me, that says they gotta be doing something right, and I wanted to find out what it was.

I met with Bill, who was good enough to give me a tour of FEA and let me in on what kinds of things they are doing in order to 'get it right'. "So Bill, as we all know, there's plenty of places to be able to get a lens today, so why should someone come to his joint to get it? I mean, it's a lens, why's your house special any better than anyone else's?" It almost seemed like he's answered this question before. "Well, I'm glad you asked - you see, that's actually a whole lot that goes into making something good. I mean, saying that all lenses are the same would be like saying every hamburger is the same thing at the end. A burger is a burger, right? Well, of course we can tell there is a difference. The only problem is that while, with a hamburger, it's a lot easier for you to tell if you got something good or bad. With a lens, it's a lot harder to tell if what your getting is as good as it claims to be." Well damn, I didn't know this was going to be so complicated, "Ok then Bill, I'm intrigued. Let's get on and head down the highway directly to Lenstown!"

HOUSE DESIGNS ★ THE SAME ANYWHERE

So we're going to go through a few of the major steps that are involved in how you make a lens. We aren't just talking about normal, old-school lenses here, of course. We're talking about free-form. That's where it's all at these days, and that's what everyone cares about, so we are just going to look at these.

I'm sure you've seen it, no matter what lab you've used before. They have their own 'private label' or 'house brand'. No matter what they call it, everyone has one, or more than one. A lot of them seem like they have it because they have to have it, and not because they want to offer it. They just toss it on the menu and make it when asked - they don't really recommend and embrace their own home cooking. That seems weird to me, as I think a real lab ace ought to be getting people to use their own home recipes, and not just following the directions from someone else's cookbook.

★ A BIG BITE ★

First thing we need to do is cook up the prescription, which, I'm told, actually involves cutting the lens, and doesn't involve an oven at all. It uses a cutting machine called a generator, apparently called that since it generates the prescription on to the back of the lens. If we're talking free-form progressives here, the generator is what's going to be creating the entire design. So it cuts the distance, the near, the corridor, the inset, everything. This one machine takes our hunk of hockey-puck-looking plastic and makes it into a progressive lens. That's off the hook.

"What you have to keep in mind here, Guy," Bill said to me, "is that this machine uses a diamond tip to cut. It can get dull, or could be slightly off, and the final lens may not be as good as it should be, but most people would never know it." I didn't believe that - of course it'd be easy to tell if something like that happened. "You need to remember, Guy, that when people check a lens, most of them just check one spot in the distance. How are they going to know if the channel is a little fuzzy? Or maybe it doesn't line up quite right? Nobody will know - they will slap it on the patient, and only worry about it if they get a complaint. Heck, that's like sniffing the milk, assuming it's fine, and waiting to see if anyone gets food poisoning from drinking it. Why not take the extra step to check the expiration date? Or even just get your milk from a place that doesn't send out bad stuff to begin with?"

Well, now I was really taken aback. He was laying down all kinds of lens learning, "What do you mean, most places don't check this? Shut the front door!"

★ LENS GAMES ★

Next we moved on to the polishing of the lenses. After they get cut, they end up a little hazy. Then we have a soft pad that mostly just 'clean ups' the surface of the lens to make it all nice and shiny. The older way of doing it was much more abrasive and took off a lot more material. Nowadays, the polish is much more gentle - at least, it's supposed to be. I had Bill explain, "This next step - polishing - can actually cause a lot of problems in the process. This is because a lot of places try to cut corners and use cheaper consumables. In this case, that means cheaper polish, or cheaper pads. Unfortunately, when it comes to a free-form design, we can do a lot of damage to it with over-polishing. When you think about it, we have this complex design on the back, consisting of thousands of points that were precisely cut. Then we're going to start rubbing it with an abrasive liquid. I'm sure you can see how it can be a problem if you don't do it correctly."

Well, I don't know about you, but I had no clue it was that easy to screw up a lens. But, how does one 'cut corners' on this? Well, apparently lots of places get cheaper pads, which can be really deceptive when it comes to quality. These kinds of pads are made with thicker, sturdier material. *continued >>>*





That means they last longer - but it also means that they are harder on the lenses, which can result in more material being taken off, or result in some of the finer areas of the lens getting blurred, like the channel. So, apparently some other labs will cut corners on saving some money and hope you will never notice what they did. That's bananas... and bananas is bad.

Now we're at one of the things that you can actually see on the lens - the reference markings. These, unlike the rest of the lens design, are something that you can pretty easily verify and make sure that they are on there. Of course, the problem is that you don't actually have any idea if they are in the right place or not. Sure, they might be close - but how close is 'close enough'? If the lab making these doesn't actually pay attention and keep their calibration constant, it can drift. Even if it only drifts 0.5 to 1.0 millimeters - that's enough for your patient to notice problems, even if nobody picks it up beforehand.

★ THE MAYOR OF LENSTOWN ★

So, it looks like while we might think that it's "just a lens", that there is a lot to quality that we can't even see that is going to affect how it is accepted and, ultimately, patient satisfaction. Fortunately, it seems like some guys know what's going on, since some of the quality initiatives I've seen at FEA are off the hook. It's something you gotta think about next time you need a lens - what am I really getting? When you go to one of the "big name" places, you pretty much know what you are going to get. You're never going to get something that's going to put the shama-lama in ding-dong, but it's going to be okay. When you look at the mom-and-pop places, you can get a lot more bang for your buck. They're not only going to give you an idea of where to go, they are going to be the ones driving the bus to Lenstown. And Lenstown is the home of all things good and awesome with lenses. They aren't just going to take you to one spot - you are going to drive around Lenstown and get a good look at all it has to offer. If that wasn't enough for you, these kinds of labs are more likely to give you the newest things because they can move a heck of a lot quicker than the big guys. They have lens technology so fresh that it'll slap ya.

You also don't want to just take the word of the guy trying to sell you something. He's always gonna tell you he's got the best, since he wants you to keep buying from him all day long. So you need to ask and see some kind of outside testing - something that shows you that they live up to all that hype they keep pushing on you. If your lab doesn't have that kind of validation - how can you tell what you're really getting? If you ain't getting the real deal, you probably want to know about it before it comes back to take a big old bite out of ya.

There are so many 'little things' that can cause big problems in a lab that it's no wonder that it's hard to tell when we are getting a quality lens, and when we are getting junk. If you want to make sure what you are getting is off the hook, you should search out these independent places that aren't afraid to experiment. Go on and get out there, and see what little lens places can do for your optical taste buds.



— Guy Fiery



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Quality of Care

— Flo, Vera and Alice

Running a great restaurant isn't about being a great chef. While it certainly helps to know how to cook, that knowledge is only ever going to get you so far. There are many more elements that go into being able to be a success in the culinary world. As a customer, however, it's easy to see the three different areas that you (as a customer) are going to really care about - the areas of presentation, service, and quality.

Presentation

Presentation is the first thing that is going to be recognized. It's when you walk in and get your first look at the place. Does it have knick-knacks all over the walls? Music memorabilia? Or are the walls plain and drab, and have a few places where the wallpaper is peeling off? First impressions matter, and it instantly sets the tone of the conversation. If the restaurant decor needs updating, what kind of message does that send to someone walking in the door? It probably tells them that they shouldn't set their standards too high when it comes to their meal.

This pre-judgement happens in the optical world as well. As soon as someone comes in, how your office looks is going to immediately set their expectations and assumptions about how good you are. Even if the two have no bearing on each other at all, it's what people do. We both know that the patient is going to have the exact same eye exam, regardless of whether or not the exam chair smells musty and has a few duct-tape patches on the seat. From their perspective, however, that kind of thing is going to make for a worse exam, even if there's no substantive change in their care.

Service

Service, in restaurant terms, is pretty easy to quantify. At the end, if you get good service, you leave an appropriate amount for a tip. If they screw up, and you aren't happy, you don't leave a tip. If they're really, really bad, you make sure to scrounge around for a few pennies to leave, so that way there's no possible way for them to assume that you just 'forgot' to leave a tip. Regardless of your level of passive-aggressive hostility, however, you hopefully get the point about what I'm lumping in under 'service'. However good your actual food is, however, is going to end up on a completely different category. We find it very easy to rate a restaurant separately on the areas of how the service was, and also on how the food was. I've been to plenty of places where they make great food, but the service is always abysmal. I've also been to places where the service was great, but it was obviously the head chef's day off.

When we look at service, it isn't just an individual effort - it takes a team to ensure that the customer's experience stays positive. It also means that you're only as strong as your weakest link. If a customer interacts with three people while at your store, and two were positive and helpful, but one was negative or difficult, which person do you think that the customer is going to remember? It's like going to a restaurant and getting a really surly host that shows you to a table. Even though your interaction with them only lasts a minute or two, it sours the rest of your dining experience, regardless of how good the rest of the meal ends up being. This can easily translate into an office environment. Your customer could receive excellent service while they are actually getting their exam or selecting eyewear - but how was their greeting? Did you set yourself up for success, or a problem? If you're running behind, do you tell the customer that you're running late and that it could be another 15 minutes? Or do you just make them wait until you're ready for them, leaving them the awkward decision of figuring out how long past their appointment time is reasonable before asking how much longer it's going to be? Most restaurants will at least tell you that a table is "about a 20 minute wait". I've never been to one where it was a "go sit in the waiting area and we'll let you know when we are ready". Those little things are the kinds of things that people remember. So we want to remove as many of those little inconveniences as possible.

Quality

This is where we actually look at how the product that is produced (whether it's a hamburger or eyewear) meets the value expectations of the customer. While it's easy to say that quality should be "as good as possible", that isn't really a helpful way to describe it. Rather, the quality that is delivered should be commensurate with what the customer thinks they should get.

With hamburgers, this expectation is usually set by where the customer chooses to go. Based on the establishment itself, the customer is going to go in with a different mentality of what constitutes 'acceptable' quality. If they go into a fast food place, they have a certain expectation of what they are going to get - besides indigestion. They know that what they are going to get isn't the best burger in the world, but they are okay with that. As long as they get what they expect, they are happy with their experience. They made a decision to go for the fast food, whether it was due to time, cost, convenience, or something else. Similarly, if they go to a more upscale restaurant and get the exact same quality fast food burger, the customer is going to be pretty upset. Even if they would have been perfectly happy with that burger from the other place. Quality, in a sense, isn't just about putting a frozen-then-microwaved burger next to a fresh-cooked burger, it's about making sure the level of quality that you deliver meets what the customer wants. Issues usually arise when the customer pays for one level of quality, and gets another.

Many opticals carry different frames at different price points. That's where can go through the process of determining what quality level the customer is looking for. Usually, that's based on what they are willing to spend. The problem with quality in eyewear, however, is that the customer really doesn't know how to tell good from bad. Most people in the business don't know, either. It's nowhere near as easy as telling a good burger from a bad burger - with those it's fairly easy to tell how good it is after tasting it. With lenses and frames, usually you don't know until later. Either they have problems seeing, the frames break, lenses scratch, or whatever. All manner of problems that can manifest later in their life. The problem here is that time gap between the purchase of the cheaper product and the failures. As a professional, it's up to you to be able to teach your customer about eyewear quality so they can make an informed decision about what you're selling. Especially when it's so easy for them to get a pair of eyewear online, you need to be able to tell them why your product is the hand-made, freshly cooked burger, and the online pair is the fast food option. Being able to explain that difference is what will help you against losing to online sales.

Overall, presentation and service are going to be your strong points of what gets your customers coming back. It's something that an online retailer can't compete with, and what allows you to set yourself apart and be memorable. I'm not saying that having a quality product isn't important - I'm just saying that it isn't as important as the other areas. Your competition can always improve their product, so you need to assume that them being "junk" won't last forever. By taking tips from the restaurant industry and focusing on the service and customer experience, you can make your own practice stand out and be the preferred place for people to keep coming back to.



The **SERIES** **ESSIL-AIDE®**

— Michael Jordan

this thing should sell itself, with all of the marketing hype that they put behind it. Since Big Sport has been able to get rid of most of the other little sports drink companies, there really isn't much left to stop them from charging whatever they want, regardless of what actually goes in the stuff.

"So, you're the new sales rep?" John asked, taking a seat behind his desk after shaking Bobby's hand. "That I am. Pleased to meet you. I'm sure you're familiar with our product, as everyone's heard about it. I see you aren't currently a customer, however, and I'm here to change that." John rubbed his chin for a moment, "Now, why would I want to do something like that?" he asked. Bobby reached into his bag and pulled out a few papers, "I'm glad you asked. Now, we aren't just asking you to buy the product - oh, no. We want to help you be able to compete and be your best business ally." It sounded like Bobby was really getting into his spiel, so John thought it'd be best if he just sat back and let him get on with it.

"That's right - we can make you an exclusive partner deluxe super distributor. You just need to sign this multi-year contract, and we'll have you on board." Bobby slide one hand deftly into an inside pocket in his jacket and offered up his special 'contract signing' pen. There wasn't really anything special about it, it just happened to have red ink in it. He had this little personal joke that they were signing the contract in blood. He wasn't sure why that appealed to him, but it did, and he never mentioned it to anyone, since that kind of thing would be a little weird.

"Apart from being a distributor of our products, you are also eligible for our Double Double promotion. This is where we take what you pay for a single bottle, double it, then give you a second bottle for free!"

John didn't seem impressed, "Double double? Did they call it that so it'd be easy for you to transition from fast food service to selling sports drinks?" Bobby decided it was best to just let that one go without comment.

**"We're the big name
— you need us."**

The slightly wary small business owner took a look down at the alarmingly small print on the contract that had somehow appeared in front of him. He took out his reading glasses and put them on, hoping the magnification would help him decipher the text. He didn't even get a chance to try before Bobby interjected, "Hey now, that's all pretty standard stuff, you don't want to try and strain your eyes trying to read that." Bobby's hand quavered slightly, the pen visibly moving as he tried to calm himself with a nervous laugh, "We're a pretty big company, so you can be sure that contract is all on the up-and-up." He tried to keep control of the situation, but the fact that there was a lot more reading than signing happening right now was not a good sign for Bobby.

"What's this part where it says I can only buy Essil-Aide® brand, and that I have to get it from specific suppliers? And this rate that you have listed here is a lot more than what I pay for other drinks. What makes your Kool-Aid so special?" Bobby hid his disappointment and urge to smack his potential customer well, and slid into what seemed like an often-used response, "This isn't Kool-Aid, this is a high-performance, scientifically engineered sports drink that increases reaction time, alertness, and ensures that you can perform your best." John waves his hand dismissively, "Yes, I've heard the commercials, I don't really need you to repeat it again."

So, you're telling me you want me to exclusively sell your brand of sports drink, and carry no other brands. In the meantime, you sell your sports drink directly to my customers online.

"Oh no, we would never sell this product to consumers ourselves. What we offer direct-to-consumer is a completely different product that doesn't have the features or effectiveness of the Essil-Aide® our partner stores carry." John snorted, "So, you just water it down and slap a different label on it? And you think that is going to help my business how?"

Bobby shook his head, "I don't think you understand how this works. We're the big name - you need us. You sign this piece of paper, we give you a big check, and then you sell our stuff. Sure, you pay more over time, but you get money now. And, let's face it, without carrying a brand like us, you'll probably be out of business soon anyway. You can't survive without Big Sports brand drinks. You need a brand name, let's face it."

John just shook his head, "I don't think I do. I have a few other places I can get sports drinks from - and they don't want me to sign a multi-year contract, and they aren't ridiculously priced either. I'm pretty sure their stuff works better than yours, too, but I'm sure you already knew all of that before you came in here."

Bobby pretty much knew he wasn't getting a sale at this point, so started to get a little passive aggressive. "Who are you going to believe about how our product performs? Some nerds in a lab somewhere with a bunch of PhDs, or the largest drink marketing company in the world? I'm pretty sure that Big Sports knows what they are doing here."

continued >>>

is **it** in you?

**"Okay, come
on Bobby, there
is nothing to this."**

He sat in his rusty Pinto in the parking lot outside the store. This was his first solo flight, but it should be easy. This guy only has a few stores, so it should be an easy score for Bobby's first day. All he had to do was use the same tactics he used last month when he was selling electronics - some people will spend more if it looks fancier or sounds cooler. Being a sports drink sales rep for Big Sport should be easy for someone like him.

Bobby entered the store and, after a brief wait, was introduced to John, the owner. Now John was easily middle aged - probably more. Bobby was hoping this meant he'd be eager for an easy way out, and that he could get an easy customer out of it. Really,



The silence that followed that statement filled the office they were seated in. It was like saying goodbye to someone several minutes before actually leaving their presence. That abrupt ending seemed to sever any other chance at communicating, however here they were, still starting at each other across the desk. Having other things that needed to get done that day, John broke the silence. “I think we’re done here. Have a good day,” he said in a perfunctory manner as he stood up, trying to make plain to his ‘guest’ the universal sign of time for you get out of my office.

Bobby stood up slowly, having taken a moment to realize exactly how badly he sunk any chance of a deal with a few simple words. “Well then, I guess you’re right. Here’s my card, you can give me a call once you realize what a benefit for your business that we are.” Since John made no motion to accept the card, Bobby placed it on the desk in front of him before standing up and heading for the door.

“I’ll tell you this, kid,” John said as Bobby grabbed the handle of the office door and paused. “You’re new to this, I get that, I’ll give you a little bit of advice. It isn’t all about the name, or the hype, or the marketing. I’m sure plenty of people will get all dazzled by a fancy logo and a big marketing budget. That’s great for them. Some people, however, want to sell a good product that works for a reasonable price,” Bobby seemed like he was going to say something, but John held up a hand. “Just let me finish - you might learn something. Now, like I was saying, some people actually want something that works well, and isn’t just fancy colored water. If they want your stuff they can just go online and get it. Hell, they can get it pretty much anywhere. But if I want to be special - to have something that’s really going to set me apart - they why would I ever want to put your stuff in here?”

There were several moments of silence. Bobby released the door handle, and gave a few more seconds of silence before he thought he was safe to answer. “You might be right about that. What I’ve got may have a few fancy labels on it, but there aren’t many out there like you. Most of them are happy with the brand, and that’s what I sell. I didn’t know that before I came in here, but now I do. You want something more from your products that can help you stand out, and what I have just makes you the same as everyone else. I get it. So, good luck to you, but I have a whole list of people that are dying to carry this just because it’s got the name.” John simply nodded in recognition as Bobby left the office.

Bobby got back in to his car, trying not to take the loss personally. He didn’t like to lose a sale, but it happens. He was used to being the number one sales guy before, and this wasn’t really what he thought he was signing up for. As he sipped on one of the promotional samples he kept in the back of his car, he looked at some of the taglines on the bottle, like *Run your own Race*, and *Always go for the Gold*. “Good advice, little bottle,” he said, tossing the it onto the floor of his car with the others, “He’s going to do what he wants in his little business, I’ll do what I do. Then we’ll see which one of us gets the gold at the end.”

“The previous story was, as I assume you’ve figured out by this point, completely fictitious. And also silly. But, that take away from it is that a brand is not what defines your business - you and the people that work there define it. If you have someone that wants a specific brand, they are going to find the cheapest and fastest way to get it. Brands are not there to help you - you are there to help them. This is not to say you can’t make money selling branded products - of course you can - but you need to look at the long term and see how much longer it makes sense for them to let you sell their products before a more profitable method of distribution comes along.”

“Reach for your own gold, not someone elses.”



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お任せ

OMAKASE

Omakase, as I'm sure you've gathered already, is a Japanese term used in an American context most frequently at sushi restaurants. The word itself roughly means "I'll leave it up to [the chef]", essentially giving the chef permission to decide what you are going to eat. Instead of selecting what you are going to eat, you entrust the chef to make that decision for you. This allows the chef to be able to select the best dish for you, based on several factors.

The first main reason to do this is to allow the chef to choose from the best available ingredients. He knows which ingredients are fresh or local, and which ones are not. It also allows the chef to combine their knowledge of their craft along with what they know about their customer. This makes it possible for the skilled chef to develop a personalized menu that suits the taste of an individual.

There are, of course, downsides to this. As you may have guessed, this isn't for the budget-minded. If you want the cheapest possible option, you don't ask the chef to choose for you. If you want them to pick, they get to pick. If you're going to be frugal about it, you need to choose for yourself. The other downside is getting something that you don't like. Since the purpose of this is to get you to try something you wouldn't have otherwise selected, there is always going to be the risk that you get something you don't really like. The chef, however good they are, can never prevent this while still making sure to give you a unique experience.

This concept doesn't work everywhere. If you try it in larger places, or chains, you may get a funny look and that's about it. You don't expect to get this kind of personal interaction with the chef at those kinds of places, and they aren't equipped to handle it. Those places may not even necessarily have 'chefs' so much as 'order takers'. They can deal with the easy, *order-off-the menu* interaction, and that's about it.

So, if we pause here for a moment and go back, and replace the idea of a 'sushi restaurant' with that of an 'optical shop', how well does that work? If the customer comes to your shop and wants

to 'order off the menu' - then do they need your shop? How likely is that customer going to be to try and order their eyewear online if they already know what they want? It's the experienced chef that helps the customer break out of this mindset of going with the 'same old thing' and finding something new. Getting closely involved in what the customer gets is how you keep the customer. This is true not only for styling frames, but also selecting lens designs. You need to get into their head to see what they are going to be using the eyewear for, and pick the lens that is going to give them the best results. Sure, they might end up with something that they don't like, but that's okay. You aren't always going to make a recommendation correctly every single time - but since you've developed a good relationship with your customer, it's easy to change them into a different lens design after you get feedback about what they didn't like. This kind of personal service is what allows you to be a step above. Many shops (especially online) only offer one progressive lens design. They just tell the patient to wear it until they get used to it, hoping they won't come back with a complaint because the shop has nothing else to switch them to. If you have a wide range of lens designs, you give yourself the ability to choose exactly the right lens for the patient.

This is probably most obvious, however, when it comes to frame choices. You are going to know your frame options a whole lot better than the person that just walked in and started trying things on. If you are able to learn about what they like - colors, styles, brands, etc. - you are well equipped to be able to make recommendations for them that they may not have otherwise

tried on. Or maybe you find they like a particular color that you don't happen to have on the board, but you can order it. Sometimes they may even know exactly what brand, shape, and style they want, depending on what movie they just watched. While you may not have the specific thing they want, this can at least give you a better idea of how you can match what you do have with what they want. I know that this should seem obvious, but it goes a long way to creating that unique value that you can offer. This goes doubly so for when you choose to not serve certain things - you are the one making the decision about what to not even show the customer, as you know they won't like it, or it won't give a good look for them.

Your ability to fit eyewear is probably the most important advantage that you have over all the other ways someone can get eyewear. Not only picking the frame, but properly adjusting it. This is one of the most noticeable things that you can offer that will bring the experience of your customer to the next level. Being able to adjust and fit frames not only makes them look better, but also feel better. When they buy something off the shelf, or online, or wherever else, they pretty much expect a 'good enough' fit. Frames may slide, or wobble, or whatever else. When they get them from you, you make sure they are fit perfectly, because that is what allows you to put the 'special touch' into your craft.

This philosophy extends beyond eyewear - it holds true for the eye exam as well. At that point, the doctor becomes the one that is being trusted by the patient. Naturally, there's some deference and respect there due to being in a patient/doctor situation (at least, there should be), so establishing trust there should be relatively easy. The problem here is not establishing trust, so much as it is about establishing your ability. With the prevalence of online vision tests, the patient in your chair is going to be very confused as to what you can do that they can't get done online.

The constant confusion about how an 'online refraction' differs from a 'comprehensive eye exam' doesn't really help.

You may find yourself needing to explain how the two are in no way comparable, and test for vastly different things. Being able to educate them about the range of tests that you are able to conduct that they can't get done online is important, as it helps establish your credibility with the patient. If you want them to put value in what you are serving up, then they need to understand why you are doing these things, and how it adds value to them.

Omakase uses trust and personal relationships to allow for an enjoyable, unique experience for the customer. It isn't just about 'eating to not be hungry', similar to how it isn't about 'getting glasses to see'. It's about enjoying the experience and finding something new that you may not have otherwise tried out. When it comes to fashion and lenses, there are so many combinations for every possible customer that there is no way they could try them all to find what they like best. Being able to help them expand their optical horizons is how you can add a superior level of value to what you do, and give them another reason to keep coming back.



— Ming Tsai

信

TRUST



LENS MATERIALS

— Paula Deen

There are a number of different choices when it comes down to what your cookware is made out of. Whether it's cast iron, stainless steel, ceramic, or glass, everything has an upside and a downside. Some of it can come down to what, specifically you are cooking, and some of it can come down to personal preference. Some materials are much better suited for some tasks.

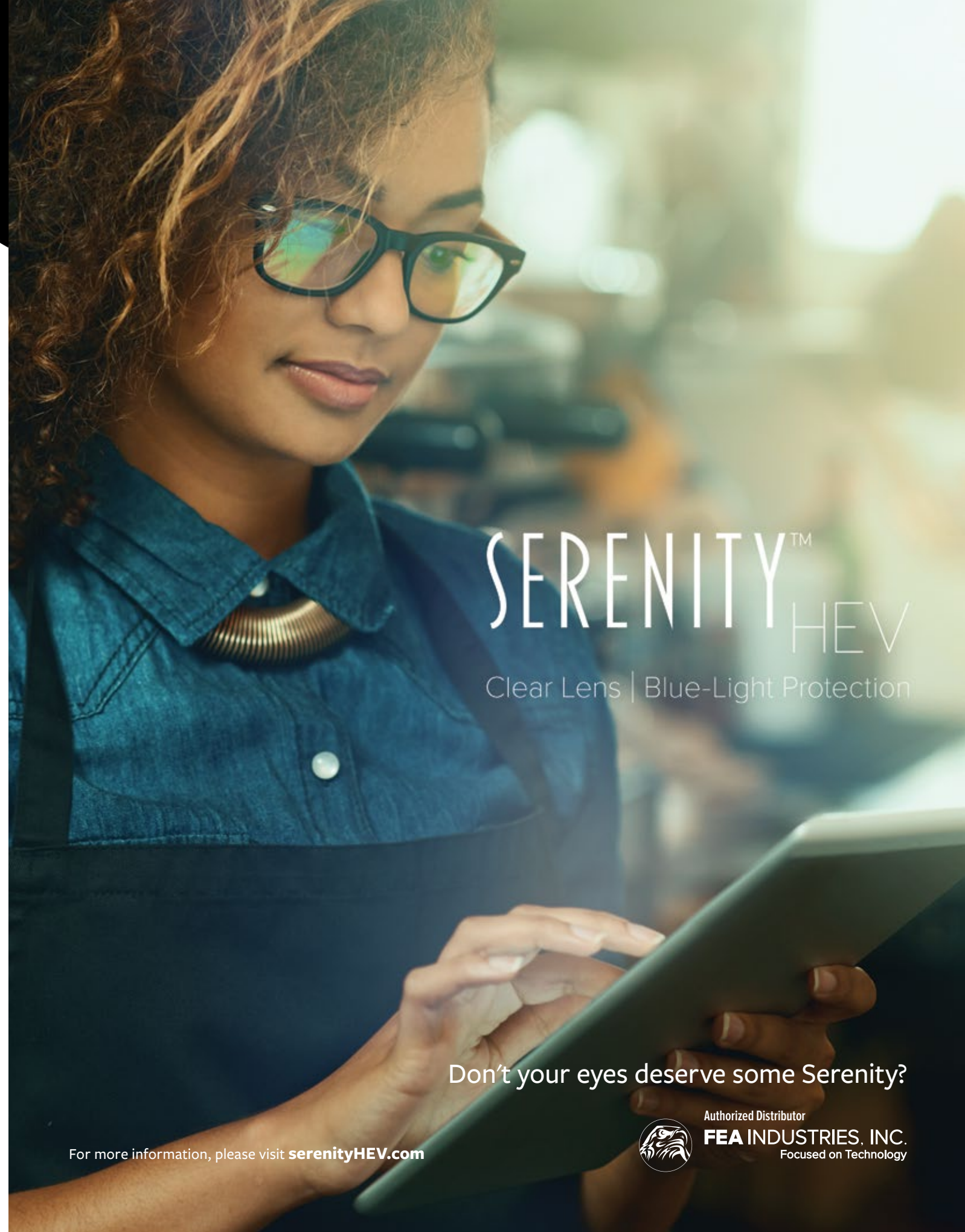
Evenness or speed of heat, weight, how much they brown food, high heat, low heat. All of it plays into what material you use to cook with. It also happens that usually some of the better materials end up costing more - if you want the better cooking experience, sometimes it's worth it. That's not to say that there's only one way that will work - far from it. What this means is that there are a number of different ways to get your final product, and each final result will be similar, yet different.

There's a lot of similarities between that and in how we choose what material to use for optical lenses. Usually you have several different materials to choose from, and some of them are going to work better than others. When recommending materials, however,

many of us tend to fall into the same trap. Plastic and polycarbonate end up being the bread and butter. They are usually one of the easiest go-to materials that get used for everything. Usually the only criteria for 'upgrading' the material is to get a thinner lens. This kind of thinking certainly works, but it also ignores the other properties of the materials. It doesn't usually take into account the finer nuances of what the materials offer. For example, where do material properties like optical clarity or aberrations rate? If you look at 1.60 index material, it tends to be fairly underutilized. Polycarbonate is much more popular, and has a very similar index of refraction. When it comes to optical properties, however, the 1.60 rates much better. It can often be used as a good stepping stone for sensitive patients, when they have a problem with aberrations in other high index materials.

Again, this kind of consideration is going to come down to each specific application and, ultimately, what your customer wants. Take glass, for example. I have seen a high number of photographers that insist on glass for the improved optics of it. Often, they've tried to get it from several places before ending up talking to me. They don't want anything else, and being able to have this as one of the tools in the kitchen, so to speak, has made it possible to capture this kind of a sale. Glass tends to be the unique material because it seems a lot of places refuse to sell it, even though it lends itself to the higher end, premium customers. It can give you the little extra touch of quality that can bring a pair of eyewear to the next level.

The only problem with materials comes about when you restrict yourself. If you limit what you offer, you limit your set of tools for helping get the exact right outcome for the patient. I mean, there's nothing saying that you can't cook the same dish in a stainless steel pan as a cast iron one. At the end of the day, what you make is going to be edible, it just won't be exactly what it should be. While this may not be a problem most of the time, it can be a very helpful addition when you are trying to differentiate yourself. In a time where it's easy to get the common materials, being able to offer more options gives you an upper hand in making sure everything is just right.



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Hi, I'm Buddy — welcome to my coating lab! Today I have with me a number of hopeful young men and women that think their coating is the best. Well, I have news for most of them - it's not. At the end of the day, it isn't what they think about their coating, it's what I think. Because I'm the boss.

Today, we are going to start out with a hard coating. Nice, simple, vanilla. Should be no trouble at all for the seasoned professionals that I have here before me, right? Let's see.

We'll start here with Mary - Mary, what do have for me? The blonde woman on the other side of the stainless steel table in front of him placed a lens down onto a white sheet between them. Buddy looked down at it, then back at her with a somewhat confused look on his face. She smiled at him, oblivious to his facial expression. He looked down again and picked up the lens, holding it at arm's length and peering at her through it. "Why is your lens yellow?" he asked her, as if he didn't already know the answer to the question. Her smile disappeared, replaced by that look children often get when the teacher calls on them to answer a question when they were really, really hoping they'd call on the other kids. "Wha... What do you mean? It's beautiful!" She was trying to pass it off, but had neither the confidence or charisma to convince anyone of it. "How long did you cook this for?" Buddy asked her in a not unkind tone as he tossed the lens back down between them. She looked down at her feet and mumbled something unintelligible. Buddy cupped a hand to his ear "Speak up. How long?" She looked back up at him, "Maybe a day or two. I don't remember." Buddy shook his head, "Let's move on then."

COATING BOSS

— Buddy Valastro

Next up was Tim's entry. He tried to look sympathetic towards Mary, but really he was just glad it was happening to someone else. He did smile a little bit towards the end of her humiliation, but that smile quickly disappeared when Buddy headed over in his direction. "So, what have you got for me today?" Buddy asked, looking down at the lens. Tim moved his hands with a flourish to try and make the piece of plastic sitting between them seem more special than it was. Buddy ignored him and looked down at the lens, "Well, the color certainly looks good," Buddy said as he reached down to pick the lens up, "so now we can see if..." Buddy paused as his fingers closed around the lens. He kept his head pointed towards the table, but his eyes swiveled in their sockets to look squarely at Tim. "Why is your lens sticky?" Tim instantly went pale, "Sticky? No, it's just...it's just not dried yet, if we wait." Buddy cut him off, "You didn't cook this, did you? If it isn't dried, you didn't cook it. It's not like this is water." Buddy released the lens and was trying to wipe his fingers off on the front of his shirt. "Well, you said you wanted it quickly, so I just thought we could speed it up. It's not like we're making a cake or something." Buddy glared at him, "This is exactly like making a cake. If you overbake it, it's trash. If you underbake it, it's trash. When you cut corners, you make trash. We don't cut corners here." Buddy continued on to the next contestant, while Tim leaned against the table, trying to keep himself steady.

Next up was Brent, who was looking rather pleased with himself. Buddy noticed. "Well, Brent, what is it that makes you so happy?" Brent's little, self-satisfied smile turned into a broad grin, "Well, I know how to use an oven," he chuckled to himself. Buddy seemed at least a little impressed, picking up the lens, "Is that so?" Buddy asked, holding the lens up to the light to get a better look at it. "It's one of the basic things that you should know about

before you do this," Brent was pushing it a little bit, as he was starting to get sour looks from Tim and Mary. Those sour looks, however, didn't last very long. They changed into wry grins as Buddy tossed the lens back onto the table, "So is cleaning the lenses before you coat it." Brent quickly picked it up as Buddy walked away. Holding it up to the light, Brent could see it there in the center of the lens. A fingerprint - underneath the coating. No way was that ever coming out.

Julie was next, she stood silently as Buddy approached. She continued to stand there as he picked up her lens and inspected it, "This one actually looks halfway decent, which means that it's finally time to get out some of our tools to measure it, and get down to seeing if this is the real deal or not." Buddy took the lens over to a little station where he had a computer set up with some kind of digital reader attached to it. "Now, this little machine here is going to tell me how thick your coating is. What we want here is consistency - we don't want it too thick or thin, and we definitely don't want it lumpy." Buddy moved the probe over the surface of the lens, and shook his head. "This one here, it's lumpy. What that means is that the lens just isn't going to hold up over time - not with an anti-reflective coating. Sure, it'll look fine for a while, but over time you'll get cracking and crazing - coating failure. And nobody wants to wear that." Buddy stood up from looking at the machine, and turned towards the others in the room. "Not only that, we can take a look at our coating adhesion as well - how good the stuff sticks to it. If your process is bad, then your coating is bad." Buddy produced some kind of claw-like tool with a bunch of razor blades on it. "Here, we use this friendly little guy to cut a crosshatch into the lens. What this does is make little squares on the lens surface so we can test how well each area of the coating is sticking to the front of the

lens. Then we take some special tape, stick it on, and see what comes off.” Buddy pulled a roll of tape from his capacious jacket and proceeded to do just that - tear off a length, press it firmly on the lens, and rip. Naturally, part of the coating came off along with it. Buddy simply shook his head. “Now, that’s what I mean. Really, that should not have happened. Usually what we do is keep alternating the lens between boiling and cold water to see how many cycles we can get through before the coating comes off. If you want someone to wear this in the real world, it needs to be able to take some punishment.”

Buddy put the lens on the table behind him, and then turned back to address the more-than-slightly dejected contestants. “See, that’s what this is about. You don’t just want something that looks good right now, you need something that is going to stay that way six months, a year, two years, or more from now. Your customer coming in has no idea how long it’s going to last - they aren’t in the business of coating lenses. We are.” Buddy gave them a moment to let that sink in. “So, as you can see, there

is a lot that goes into making a quality coating. It isn’t just a simple process, and there’s a whole lot that can go wrong with it. Unfortunately, you may never even be able to tell if the coating that you get is any good until a few months later, when it goes bad. These kinds of things are what separates the *run-of-the-mill* coating from a really great one. It doesn’t matter what someone tells you about it - you need the proof and tests to make sure you’re getting the real thing. Don’t let them BS you - you’ll never know until it’s too late. So, until next time, I’m Buddy - the Coating Boss.”

Buddy's Coating Quality Checklist

A good coating takes more than a recipe, it needs an experienced professional to get a great result. Sometimes you can’t always tell if what you are getting is what you think you’re getting. Here’s a list of things you should check with your head baker to make sure they can really make a Boss-level coating. ☼



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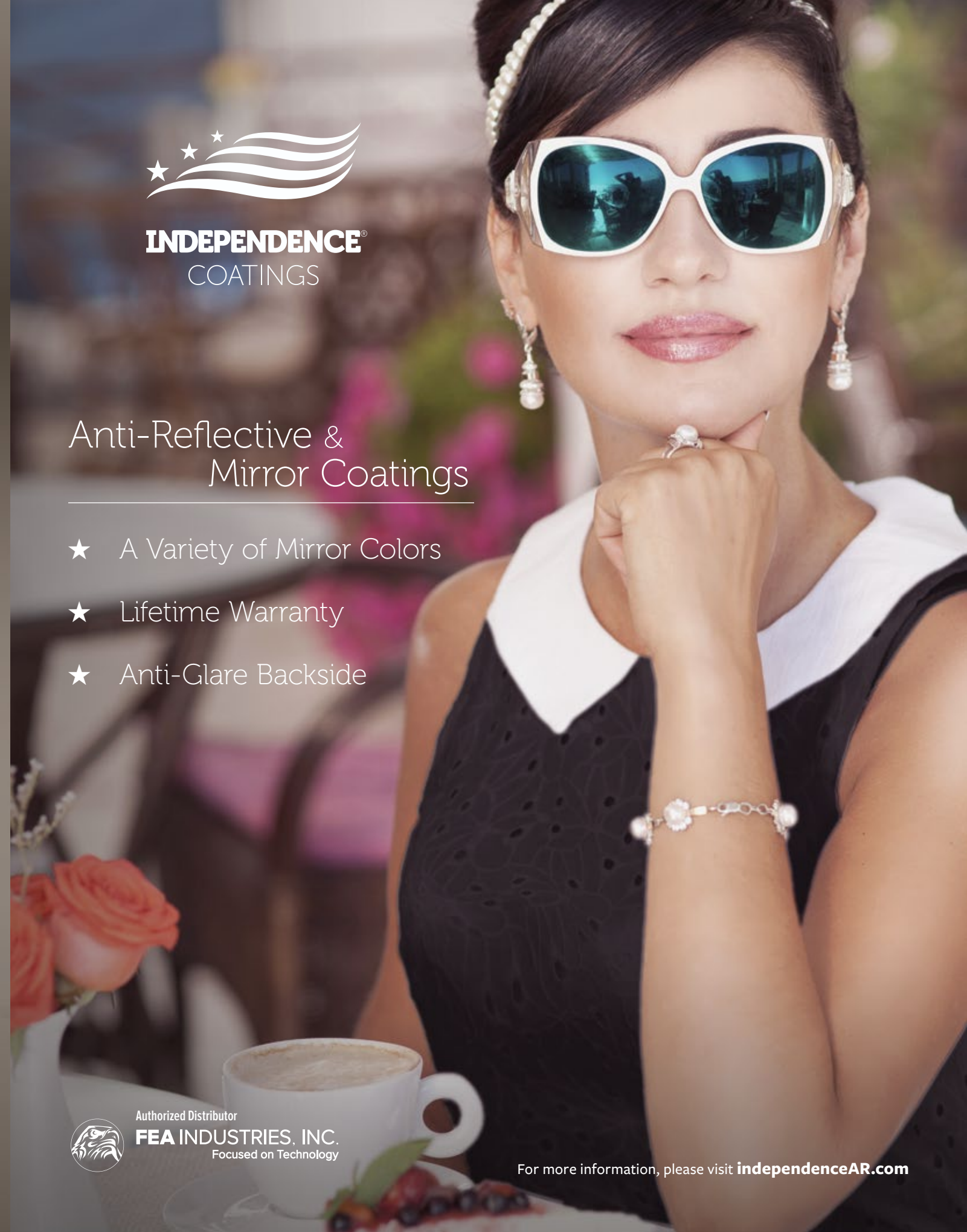
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Verification and DISPENSING QUALITY EYEWEAR

— Sam Winnegrad

When you order coffee, you are concerned about just that one cup - you don't care about any of the others that are being made and sold. You also don't care how busy that barista is - you want your order correct, or else. It can be in those final steps before dispensing the final product that obvious errors slip through. They were in a rush, so forgot the shot of caramel you wanted. Like being in a rush to inspect a frame and not noticing some of the paint was coming off before handing it to a patient. These are the last-minute 'oops' problems that can be easily avoided, but can cause major issues in how your customer perceives you and your skill level. Developing good habits to maintain quality at every step becomes very important to give your business its daily pick-me-up.

Quality matters. As an eyecare professional you have spent years honing your craft - learning how to translate your knowledge into the very best experience and visual outcome for your patients. Why would you allow shoddy, inferior lab work to diminish your excellence? After all, your personal brand is on the line every time you dispense a pair of eyeglasses.

Statistics demonstrate that up to 50% of eyeglasses manufactured in the United States would not be able to pass ANSI standards. If you are like me, hearing that is startling and revelatory. Not only should YOUR eyeglasses transcend the ANSI guidelines, they should consistently exceed them. As you are assuming that your lab technician thoroughly inspects your finished eyewear, they are at the same time presuming that you will not perform due diligence on the same set of eyeglasses. With all the talk generated around the emergence and disruption caused by the online eyeglass market; it is now more important than ever to differentiate yourself through quality.

Accurately verifying the dioptric power of your patient's lenses is foundational to the final inspection process. ECP's are generally pretty good at power discernment; wherein, the true "miss" in this area is not following through on the other crucial aspects of eyeglass neutralization. It is never acceptable to verify lens

power without first focusing the eyepiece. Even if you are the only optician in your office who uses the lensometer you should still develop the habit of routinely ensuring that your focimeter is focused for your eyes. Secondly, read the power of the lens at the optical center (where there is no prism present). This will ensure the most accurate reading. Along with the dioptric power of the lens, you must also verify that the lenses have been edged to the prescribed axis. Make sure that the eyewear is level on the lens table as you verify the meridian. As you know, even slight axial changes with higher cylinder levels can cause a dramatic shift in one's vision. Even worse, many times your patient will adapt to these incorrect lenses and not see as well as they ought. Set yourself up for an easy dispense where the patient does not have to overcome unnecessary, peculiar adaptations.

All lenses that have dioptric power will have some prismatic effect. As opticians, we must be comfortable with prism and routinely verify either the absence thereof, or that the lenses have been surfaced with the prismatic strength and direction, as prescribed. Many times, we can overcomplicate the prism

way too much. With the prevalence of progressive lenses, it is even easier than ever to work with, as we are given a prism reference point. Just view your mires through the reticle and see where they land on the target. Understand that vertical prism in opposite directions compounds, and that horizontal prism in the same direction compounds. Know what effect it will have on your patients when they encounter unwanted prism or a vertical imbalance. This is how you will not only be the subject matter expert, but translate this into customer satisfaction.

We spend so much time ensuring that we are at just the right height as we take our vertical decentration measurements (OC, segment height); however, in general, opticians spend far less time ensuring that the finished spectacles reflect this precision. Take the extra minute to verify your OC heights for accuracy, consistency and levelness. Go one step farther and leave the fitting cross on your patient's lenses as you verify their fit and centration. Doing so will provide a more technical, trustworthy experience in your patient's eyes, and will also dramatically aide in your final adjustment. Explain what you are doing and your customers will appreciate the extra efforts to ensure that they are seeing their very best.

Similarly, we must verify our horizontal pupillary distance measurements. As the eye moves away from the specified pupillary centration, the prismatic effect multiplies. If a 5 diopter lens is off by just 3 millimeters the patient will encounter 1.5 diopters of unwanted prism. One thing to look out for when verifying PDs are lenses with little to no power along the 180 degree meridian. If you have ever tried to verify the PD measurements on a pair of eyeglasses and could not decenter the mires, more than likely it is because there is no power along the 180. The reticle on the lensometer only measures prism strength and direction - and if there is no power to induce prism the mires will stay centered in the reticle regardless of their horizontal position. The good thing is that in these instances the horizontal PD measurement is irrelevant. Bottom line - verify your horizontal measurements to ensure that you are not impairing your patients vision.

Do you verify that the lenses are the correct material as ordered? As eyecare professionals we understand the differences in the optical qualities of the various lens mediums; we know that dispensing a polycarbonate lens to a patient that needs CR-39 can have a negative effect. When we contemplate the index, abbe value and specific gravity differences of the multiplicity of materials available to us we begin to realize the importance found in material verification. Most PALs will identify the material on the lens as an engraving. Outside of progressives, the experienced optician will rely on lens pitch and edge characteristics to authenticate.

Have you ever received a pair of glasses in and noticed that there was something asymmetrical about the lens shapes? Do not take it for granted that the lenses are the proper profile and circumference. There are quite a few things that can translate incorrectly during the lens tracing process. Be extra watchful inspecting finished eyeglasses for the proper bevel and that there is no discernable roominess or air spaces. Other things to watch include safeguarding that lenses are of the proper color; polished edges are clear and even, and that any coatings are consistent and uniform throughout.

After determining that the finished lenses are faultless it is of utmost importance to inspect the frame. Not only do you want to ensure that the frame is not marred, rolled or worse; you must also verify that it is in fact the pair that your patient ordered. Few things will diminish your credibility as fast as dispensing the wrong eyewear. If you are supplying the same frame that was used during the sale, it should be pre-adjusted (since we know this is the only way to achieve accurate measurements). Otherwise, if a new frame is used for the finished eyeglasses be sure that they are bench aligned and ready for your patient.

First impressions are everything. Dispensing a new pair of eyeglasses with a nauseating smudge in the center of a lens is deplorable. Make the dispense 'a big deal.' Provide a case, microfiber cloth and lens cleaner. Restate the benefits of the patients purchase and take the time to showcase the value that you are offering them. Be proud that you critiqued the finished eyewear - knowing that they represent the accuracy and perfection that your personal brand demands.

Now may be a good time to ask yourself, "Do I value quality?" Though, I would assume that every eyecare professional would answer this reflection with an emphatic, "Yes!"; the truth is that our values are reflected in our opticals and in the eyewear that passes through our doors. Evaluate the current system that you are using to scrutinize your specs. Where does it fall short and how can you adjust to make necessary changes? Improve your quality. Protect your brand. Promote your value. ⚙️

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Promote your
VALUE

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