

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF A STRONG CONTACT LENS PRACTICE REMAIN SURPRISINGLY CONSISTENT

By William K. Vincett, Jr., OD

One of the biggest lessons I learned as a practice owner is that contact lens success is controllable. It does not happen by accident.

Early in my career, I joined my father's Pittsburgh-based practice with essentially no contact lens business. Over time, I grew annual contact lens revenue more than 500% to \$2.4 million. That growth came about because I identified contact lenses as an underutilized opportunity and chose to focus on it.

Although I sold my multioption practice a few years ago, I consult with practice owners looking to grow their contact lens volume. I encourage them to ask where their current processes create friction—whether in recommending lenses, scheduling fittings, managing orders, communicating with patients or handling follow-ups. The greatest growth opportunities are often found in small operational improvements that simplify the process for doctors and staff and make it easier for patients to say yes.

Here are the timeless fundamentals to adopt or reinforce.

Look for unmet needs

A practice grows when doctors look for patients' unmet needs rather than waiting for patients to ask about them.

Many patients do not know they could benefit from contact lenses. It is especially true today, when we have more lens options than ever to address lifestyles, occupations, activities and unique vision needs. Multifocal torics, specialty designs and other advanced modalities allow doctors to solve problems that would have been difficult—or impossible—to address years ago.

Simple questions like, "Are there activities you enjoy where glasses get in the way?" or "When would you rather not wear glasses?" can shape the conversation. The more you understand the patient's life, the better you can match a lens to the need.

That conversation should not stop when the exam ends. If patients hear about contact lenses only once a year, opportunities

are missed. Use marketing and social media to remind patients about the benefits of convenience, comfort, vision and lifestyle.

Convenience is an expectation

Today, patients expect the conveniences of digital ordering and direct-to-patient shipping. I encourage practices I advise to look for a vendor partner that adds convenience without taking the patient relationship away from the practice. Online ordering portals, responsive customer service and efficient fulfillment can make it easier for patients while keeping the practice—not the vendor—at the center of the relationship.



Dr. Vincett

That's why an independent vendor like ABB Optical Group can help as it supports the entire practice rather than a more focused line of products. I also encourage practices to pay attention to the economics. If your practice generates significant lens volume, your vendor partner should recognize that value and provide support that contributes to profitability.

The value of specialty fits

I still encounter doctors tempted to take the path of least resistance rather than pursue the lens that will truly solve the patient's problem. If a toric lens is appropriate, fit a toric lens. If a patient is a good scleral lens candidate, pursue that fit.

Specialty lenses are not something to fear. They are an opportunity to serve patients better—and, when managed appropriately, to build a stronger practice through patient loyalty and referrals.

Don't forget about the dropouts

Lens technology has improved substantially, especially in comfort and moisture retention. A patient who stopped wearing contact lenses years ago may have a very different experience with today's materials and designs. In my practice, we welcomed patients who had previously dropped out. We also used email marketing to introduce new lens designs and offer no-risk trials and establish ourselves as a specialty practice.

Those strategies remain relevant today. Positioning your practice as a resource for patients who have not been successful elsewhere can open an important source of new opportunities.

Educate patients on medical device classification

Patients can easily view contact lenses as interchangeable consumer products. Online lens suppliers and consumer-style packaging can reinforce that perception.

Explain that contact lenses are classified and regulated by the FDA as medical devices (with expiration dates). That education can help patients understand that a contact lens is not simply to be selected based on price or convenience and can reinforce the importance of follow-up, proper hygiene and adherence to replacement schedules.

Anticipate objections and be transparent

Transparency prevents the problem of patients questioning why a contact lens fitting is different from and additional to a comprehensive eye exam. Once patients understand the extra doctor time, evaluation and specialized equipment required, it becomes much less of an issue.

Don't undermine your value

Doctors should be compensated for their expertise and chair time. Difficult fits take time, and that time has value. Determine what the patient needs, explain the options clearly and ensure the practice is compensated fairly for delivering that care. Prioritize that over concern of what the patients may want to spend. Otherwise, doctors inadvertently communicate that the expertise itself has little value.

Keep these fundamentals of contact lens success in mind as you focus on the growth opportunity. **PA**

William K. Vincett, Jr., OD is principal of Vincett Consulting Group, providing expert coaching to independent OD owners to accelerate growth, improve profitability and build financially resilient, high-value practices that maximize exit outcomes. Learn more at www.vincett.com.