

# BUILDING ON A STRONG LEGACY



Angel Alvarez



James Gilchrist

## A Q&A with ABB Optical Group Founder Angel Alvarez and President James Gilchrist

The optical industry is rapidly evolving, and ABB Optical Group has been at the forefront of these changes for over 30 years. In this Q&A, *The Profit Advisor* talked with **Angel Alvarez**, the founder of ABB Optical Group, and President **James Gilchrist** to discuss the journey of ABB, their commitment to independent eye care professionals (IECPs) and their vision for the future.

### The beginnings

**Q:** Tell us how ABB Optical Group got started.

**Angel Alvarez:** "I was working for what was then Ciba Vision when the opportunity arose. The business landscape was shifting towards disposable contact lenses, and I saw independent doctors struggling with the logistics of this transition. They weren't equipped to handle the increased transaction volume. It was 400% to 800% more volume than what they had been doing. This, combined with the rise of mail order, made it challenging for them to remain competitive.

"My background in finance and my work at Florida Power and Light and Ciba helped me realize that these doctors needed more than just products; they needed a strategy. I had been running the kind of what-if scenarios—the sorts of reports that Excel does now—to help build business in territories. That's when I decided to start ABB to help doctors manage their practices better.

"It was really a fundamental change. Until that time, IECPs felt like the only variable they could control was price. But we came in and helped them develop a strategy with a fee analysis plan. That became the start of *The Profit Advisor* and the *Price*



*Monitor*. We would analyze our highest performing 500 practices and study what they were doing."

**Q:** How important has the commitment to IECPs been since ABB's inception?

**Angel Alvarez:** "For over 30 years, our commitment has been to help eye care professionals attract and keep patients, improve efficiencies and increase profitability. We win when they win. When they lose a patient, we lose a patient. It has always been central.

"One of our proudest achievements is helping independent practitioners, who represent 70% of the eye exam business, leverage the collective volume of thousands of IECPs to stay competitive."

**Q:** How well positioned do you think ABB is for the future?

**Angel Alvarez:** "ABB is uniquely positioned due to our ability to adapt quickly and be independent. We've invested

heavily in technology and remain committed to the success of IECPs. Our impartial and interconnected approach allows us to deliver what's best for the consumer. We have always believed that when the IECPs gain business, we gain business."

### Building on that legacy

**Q:** James, building on the legacy that Angel and his team built, how do you see ABB continuing to support IECPs?

**James Gilchrist:** "Through our competitive suite of products, services and solutions, we help eye care professionals maintain their edge. We offer single-source convenience, access and choice, data and business insights and enhanced services. Our commitment to being authentically independent sets us apart. We can't win unless our IECP customers are winning."

**Q:** What unique strengths set ABB apart?

**James Gilchrist:** "First, I want to say how much Angel impressed me with his leadership, long before I joined this company. He was a leader who stood for certain principles and values and always put ABB's IECP customers and employees at the center of ABB's focus.

"Our unique combination of independence and breadth of capabilities is a differentiator. In this era, we have companies at two ends of the spectrum. We have those companies that are vertically and horizontally integrated with significant assets and capabilities to serve their customers, but they are not independent and

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often also compete with their customers. This shapes, and sometimes limits due to competing priorities, how they can support IECPs. On the other end are companies that serve one specific market area or optical category and have deep capabilities and expertise in that area to serve their customers, but they lack the breadth of capabilities to serve IECPs across their entire business.

“ABB sits in the middle as the only independent service provider with the breadth and depth of capabilities to support IECPs across all three optical categories—contact lenses, stock lenses, and frame—to help them grow their businesses. At ABB our focus is empowering IECPs as the largest independent provider of optical services and solutions to provide better vision for their patients. Our goal is to leverage our capabilities so our IECP customers can focus on what matters most to them—patient care.”

## Vision for the future

### Q. What’s your vision for the future of ABB and how it might evolve as the industry does?

**James Gilchrist:** “We aim to stay authentically independent and focused on solving the unique challenges of eye care providers so that they can thrive. We believe that our unique position in the market enables us to be the industry leading partner to



Celebrating early success with YourLens.com

IECPs and other industry players.

“We have tremendous assets that we can leverage with our partners. Today we are the industry leading contact lens distributor and the largest and fastest growing independent ophthalmic lab network. We’ve invested in a suite of services to drive efficiency and growth for our IECPs and partners. As part of our next evolution, we are looking at how to bring together these capabilities, in combination with key partners in each optical category, to best serve our IECP customers in the uniquely independent way that only ABB can. We want to focus on what differentiates us and does not create distractions.

“There are so many opportunities in this incredible and dynamic industry, but we need to stay focus on our core business, as

the only pure play service provider that can support all optical categories, and bring the right programs to our customers.”

**Angel Alvarez:** “Change happens first among the independents. They’re the tip of the spear. They’re very quick to want innovative solutions, so it’s a great place to be.”

**James Gilchrist:** “ABB Optical Group’s remaining authentically independent is a cornerstone of our success. By continually adapting and leveraging technology, we are well-positioned to support the evolving needs of the independent eye care professionals. Our teams are dedicated to helping your business thrive so that you can focus on what matters most.” **PA**

**Thank You For Your Interest!**  
An ABB CONCISE representative will contact you shortly.

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**Lower transaction Costs:**  
Administrative cost to fulfill each Rx order reduced from \$7.00 to \$2.93 - \$4.07 savings per order

- Less time to order
- Less time spent on patient call-backs
- Less bookkeeping time
- Less handling and invoice reconciliation
- Typical account with 1,000 orders per year saves over \$4,000
- Reduction in shipping and handling charges with one daily shipment

**Predictable, rapid delivery:**  
\$20 million ABB CONCISE inventory assures

- 99%+ fill rate on spherical brands
- 95%+ fill rate on specialty lens brands
- Reliable delivery schedule eliminates need for patient call-backs

**Global Management of Practice's Contact Lens Business:**  
Quarterly ABB CONCISE business reviews

- Product mix trends versus industry trends
- Gross profit margins
- COG savings opportunities
- Banks and inventory offers

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Through the years, ABB Optical Group has been sharing strategies for success with its accounts.