

# Back to the future

*Optician* reports from International Vision Expo West in Las Vegas, where delegates and exhibitors reflected on the event's 25 year history while welcoming in a raft of new technologies

**C**elebrating its 25th anniversary at last October's four-day event at the Sands Expo & Convention Center in Las Vegas, the International Vision Expo West exhibition showed that it remains a vital part of the global optical trade show calendar.

Organisers Reed Exhibitions reported a 5 per cent increase in visitor numbers at the event, with some 13,000 delegates from 89 countries in attendance. Those who made the trip to 'Sin City' saw nearly 5,000 brands from 425 exhibitors.

'International Vision Expo is unlike any other medical meeting,' says Courtney Muller, group vice-president for Reed Exhibitions. 'Each year, we are challenged with sourcing and delivering the most innovative eyewear and eye care products,



technologies and comprehensive solutions for our attendees, their businesses and ultimately their patients. This is not a sleepy industry. The buzz from attendees around the variety of products and technologies at this year's show was a testament to that, and there's a lot more in store for 2014.'

While organisers have their eye on the future of the show, some of the delegates and exhibitors reflected on the past and in particular, how the event has changed over the 25 years. Fort Worth Texas optometrist Richard

Ditto couldn't remember how many years he had been coming to the event. 'I've been coming since the 1980s, back when it was called OptiFair. Today, there are more people attending and a lot more technology that goes into glasses. The stands are also much better and I thought that the addition of the medical and scientific pavilions was a great idea as it made easier to find what you're looking for among all the frames, lenses and equipment.'

Transitions Optical general manager for Latin America Jose Alvez is another long-standing attendee and believes the draw of the event is far-reaching. 'I've been coming here for more than 20 years. The show has grown tremendously in that time, particularly internationally, which has helped us grow our business globally. Because the show has been so popular, particularly in Latin America, it has become a fantastic place to launch new products which have been designed for that market,' he says.

Others, such as Cindy Sacco from AA Jones Optical in Ontario, were visiting the show for the first time. 'There's a lot to learn but it's nice to see the new and upcoming technologies – there's more than just eyeglasses. I tried an eyeglass-like product from Zeiss (the Cinemizer), that you put around your head and shows 3D video – you can watch movies on it,' she says.

## Technology in focus

The Cinemizer device that Sacco tried was located among 12 exhibitors in the Eye 2 Zone – a technology-



**A technology-focused section of Expo West showcased advancements in eyewear such as the eSight low-vision device**





focused section which showcases advancements in eyewear and how it can be used for new purposes. The zone, curated by Vision Monday, made its debut at Vision Expo East last year and returned for the Las Vegas event with new exhibitors such as eSight, which demonstrated its low-vision eSight device. The eyewear is no more cumbersome than regular fit-over sunglasses. It uses a small high resolution camera to send signals to a separate processor and controller which transmits signals to two small LED screens inside the frame – which can also be fitted with Rx lenses. The controller unit allows the user to focus the camera, switch magnification (1.5x to 14x), change contrast settings to best-suit different conditions and switch between, near, intermediate and distance viewing – something which the manufacturer claims is rare functionality in this type of device. It added that the best visual acuity range is 6/18 to 6/120, but marketing vice-president Julie Fotheringham says one of its customers has acuity levels of 6/420 and still has success using the device.

Optician was shown the device by eSight customer relations and administrative assistant Tyler Moore, who has suffered from low visual acuity since birth from retinopathy of prematurity. 'eSight eyewear has really changed my life at work and at

home,' enthuses Moore. 'The auto-focus camera and the hands-free nature of the device enable me to see while doing my job with the company. With eSight eyewear, I can undertake a wide range of tasks – working on my computer one minute and then looking up and recognising a colleague who wishes to discuss something.'

### Shaping the future

Technology developments in manufacturing took centre stage on Clearvision Optical's stand. The rise of 3D printing in manufacturing is something of a hot topic in the optical industry as the technology has the potential to impact many facets of the industry but in particular, frame production.

Many frame manufacturers use 3D printing for creating prototypes but over the past 18 months more are using the technology for final production. The upsurge has raised some interesting questions and opinion from buyers and manufacturers. Some proclaim that 3D printing will change the industry and others predict that patients and buyers could well move for an ultra-handmade product with imperfections visible as a form of authenticity.

Questions such as these prompted Clearvision to host a panel discussion about the technology and how it might progress in the optical industry.

Chaired by Frank Giammarco, president and CEO First Vision Media Group, the panel brought together Clearvision's president David Friedfeld and its IT manager Herschel Kaufman, along with Bruce Bradshaw, marketing director of American 3D printing firm Stratasys.

Friedfeld began by explaining how Clearvision currently uses the technology: 'At the moment we're using the technology to reduce the amount of time the company spends in the design phase. We currently create prototypes overseas and the time it takes from initial designs with CAD drawings to having a physical prototype in our hands can take up to eight weeks. With the modest 3D printer we have, we can bring this process down to approximately one day. It means we can react quicker to mistakes and reduce lead time for manufacturing which benefits our customers.'

As the panel weaved its way through some of the history of the technology, talk predictably turned to whether the rise in 'prosumer' 3D printers would signal the start of individuals printing off their own frames. Friedfeld likened the situation to the growth of the internet and whether it has really turned bloggers and the like into publishers, while Bradshaw drew comparisons with the boom of desktop publishing in the late 1980s,



- 1 Clearvision Optical demonstrates 3D printing technology
- 2 Frank Giammarco (far left) chairs a discussion on 3D printing with (l-r) David Friedfeld, Bruce Bradshaw and Herschel Kaufman
- 3 British firm Adlens shows off its variable focus progressive lens technology
- 4 Michael C Ferrara demonstrates the new Focuss eyewear and claims it is a game-changing product

multiple LensCrafters which will see Focuss spectacles exclusively trialed in its stores early this year. A spokesperson for LensCrafters said it expected to trial the eyewear with a retail price of between \$500 and \$700 – comparable with the value of its average progressive dispenses.

Adlens CEO and executive chairman Michael C Ferrara said LensCrafters was an iconic retailer synonymous with innovation and described Focuss as a game-changing product that would improve lives.

Adlens called upon research carried out by Gfk which found that half of the 54 million Americans that wear progressive lenses reported dissatisfaction with existing lens technology. In addition, the study found that 99 per cent Americans aged 50 and over own a computer, laptop desktop or netbook and that 35 per cent own a smartphone. A further 17 per cent own a tablet device and 9 per cent intend to buy one in the next year. The company hopes that the Focuss eyewear line will tap into this potentially lucrative segment.

This year's International Vision Expo West exhibition and education programme will take place on September 17-20. ●

which made it easier to create layouts but in his opinion didn't turn everyone that used the software into graphic designers. Other topics discussed included the need for regulation to stop the copying of proprietary designs and Kaufman believes that regulatory models used for music sites like iTunes and Napster could be deployed for 3D printing.

It was refreshing to see a manufacturer talk openly about its technology, especially when many are wary of the impact it could have on their business. Bradshaw agrees: 'I'd like to commend David and Clearvision for having this discussion. It's unusual for a company like theirs to be so open about how it innovates.'

Friedfeld finished off the discussion

by assuring the crowd that the company would continue its openness at future shows and via the company website.

### Powers of innovation

British firm Adlens made the headlines at the event with new technology of its own. The variable focus eyewear manufacturer used the show to debut its Focuss line of variable focus progressive lens eyewear technology. The Focuss eyewear incorporates variable near, intermediate and distance vision with a shared single vision lens. Users turn a stepped dial on the inside of the temple to change the power of the reading addition.

At the unveiling, Adlens announced a strategic partnership with US

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