



Why your clients want you to sell them expensive specs

Forget what people need, focus on what they want. It's very basic retailing, argues **Richard Pakey**

There is a particular condition that holds back a lot of practice owners, and it is one which seems to affect optometrists more than dispensing opticians.

The symptoms are easy to spot, and while they appear to be minor, the long-term effects of the condition can be devastating.

Do you have this problem? If you have ever heard yourself say something along the lines of: 'I didn't become an optician to make loads of money,' or 'I didn't become an optician to be seen to be selling,' then it's quite possible you do.

Our unique business model financially penalises us for focusing on selling clinical services above products. And so, more than any other kind of healthcare provider, optical practitioners are caught in a terrible quandary. The practices that survive and thrive are the ones that are better at retail sales. Put simply, if you don't sell enough product with good enough margins, you're doomed.

And this is where the internal debating starts. No one gets into optics to be rich. We do it because we enjoy it and value our place in the community. Even Dame Mary Perkins did not start Specsavers to become rich. Without knowing her, it's clear to me that she did it for the challenge and to change the world, and became the UK's first female billionaire along the way. That was a by-product, and never the goal.

So for many, it seems criminally wrong to push products to clients. 'My patients hate it when we sell to them, so we never push products unless they absolutely need them,' a practice owner proudly declared to me last week.

In some respects he's right. I'm not suggesting you try to sell things to your clients that they don't want. In the current economic climate, that's impossible anyway.

What we're talking about here is forgetting what people *need* and focusing instead on what they *want*.

Ever asked yourself what makes an

ordinary person drop £1,000 on a pair of Cartier frames? Believe me, they don't need them, but they do want them.

Humans are driven by 'I want'. It powers our economy and our continual desire to improve ourselves. As much as we would like to believe what we buy is driven by our logical brain assessing the implications of each purchase, we are actually driven by our emotional heart. It sees nice shiny things and wants them.

We need clothes to keep us warm but want to look nice. We need basic nutrition but want to eat in a restaurant. We need transport to move from A to B but want an Aston Martin.

This is about finding out what your clients want, then selling it to them. Simple as that. It's very basic retailing. And completely ethical. Yet so few optical practitioners get it right.

Happy customers

I have a client in a small northern town who has an ageing client base, predominantly NHS, with a low average dispense value. There's not a lot of money in this town. It is dominated by pound shops and charity shops, and you can sense that most people struggle to meet ends meet.

Yet this is a practice that in the past six months has sold about 40 pairs of Maui Jim sunglasses – mid-range sunglasses (expensive for that town) sold in autumn and winter. That hasn't happened because the people in that town needed them. But when they saw them, they liked them and they wanted them. Badly enough to pull out their credit cards and snap them up.

And those clients won't be unhappy about this. They won't be sitting at home moaning about how they spent £50 more than they wanted to. Yes they might feel the pain at some point when the credit card bill arrives. But on the whole they will feel happy. Happy that they saw something they wanted and happy that they now own it.

Here's the odd thing: people who spend more on products tend to be



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People who spend more tend to be better long-term clients

better long-term clients. They talk about you positively, return on time for their next test, refer you to their friends and continue to spend well at each visit.

So long as you put the right products in front of them. That's key to getting this right. Don't think you can achieve this without great brands that your clients have heard of.

The days of cheap and nasty unbranded frames are gone. If you want more money in the till, you need frames that make them go 'Wow!' – even in markets that supposedly don't have any money. When you match the brands to the market, you'll be surprised how quickly the right frames can sell.

Get this right and it benefits your practice and generates profit. If you need to self-justify making more profit, decide to re-invest in better resources and facilities. The practices that invest in themselves on a regular basis are more robust businesses.

You could also take the profit as personal income and enjoy yourself. You don't need to do this. But maybe you want to. ●

● **Richard Pakey** is the author of *It's Time To Fight Back*, now owned by more than 2,700 UK practice owners. You can get a free copy at www.freeopticiansbook.com