



If your average dispense value isn't as high as you'd like it to be, it's not just down to the performance of your dispensing opticians. Your sales revenue is totally influenced by everything that happens to a patient while they are in your practice.

If the very first thing they see when entering the practice is a miserable receptionist chewing on a wasp, then you are fighting a downhill battle from there on. That person's spend will be lower and your chance of retaining them in the future will decrease.

Here's a better example of the damage that can be done to your sales. The optometrist can inadvertently destroy the dispensing optician's chances of getting a good value sale. Here are three ways the optometrist may do this.

Mistake 1

The optometrist tells the patient not to buy anything new

They do this by telling them there is no change in their prescription. That's a disastrous phrase to use!

'No change' is interpreted as 'you don't need to buy anything'. It's such a powerful way to kill sales, that it can even put off people who were determined to buy something anyway.

I recently spoke to a practice owner who had just dealt with a patient complaint. An elderly lady stormed into his practice demanding to see him, about the eye test she had had three days before. She was furious, because she had owned her glasses for more than 10 years and fancied some new ones. But the optometrist had said to her: 'Your prescription hasn't changed so there's no need for you to buy new glasses.'

She had sat at home stewing for three days. And the reason she wanted to meet with the practice owner was to ask for special dispensation to buy new glasses anyway.

This is why the phrase 'no change' must be swapped for 'stable prescription'. And you have to stop your optometrists from thinking they are doing people a favour by telling them they don't need new glasses. They're not. All they're doing is killing sales.

It's not down to us to decide whether or not someone is going to buy new product. It's down to them. People buy when they're ready to buy. And sometimes they are ready to buy even when there is no real need to buy.

The worst thing we can do is pre-judge what someone will or won't

The optometrist's role in increasing dispense values

A little extra attention to the patient handover goes a long way to helping the DO make a good value sale, says **Richard Pakey**



Rex Features

The DO alone isn't responsible for product sales

buy. That scruffy patient you see once a year? They might be a millionaire with a penchant for £4,000 frames. That lady that says 'I don't want to spend much' is actually thinking no more than £200. But you've just taken her to the £99 range.

Mistake 2

The optometrist doesn't pass the authority back to the DO

It's really important to look at your practice through the eyes of your patients. Most of them don't really know what's happening (or care), they just want their eyes tested and their products prepared.

They don't really know the difference between an optometrist and a dispensing optician. Yes, some do, but the majority don't. We're all just opticians to them. The one big difference is that they have a huge amount of trust in their optometrist.

After all, they trust that person with their most precious sense. They completely understand that what happens in the test room is a healthcare procedure necessary to keep them healthy.

And an eye test is such an intimate procedure when you think about it.

You are physically close to someone in a private, darkened room. Patients have immense amounts of trust in their optometrist. A good optometrist will efficiently pass that authority to the dispensing optician. The worst kind of handover involves the patient going back to sit in the waiting room until the dispensing optician is free. Every minute that passes, the likely value of the dispense is going down.

The best kind of handover sees the optometrist directly introducing the dispensing optician immediately after the test. The optometrist actually tells the patient the benefits of having this person continue to look after them, and why they will do such a great job.

This is a process called pre-framing. It sets up the dispensing optician to take the authority from the optometrist. We give our patients a 'guide script' to help them implement it correctly.

I know this isn't always practical and timings can be tricky sometimes. But if you can do it like this most of the time, you will see an increase in sales.

Mistake 3

The optometrist doesn't guide the patient what to buy

This goes hand in hand with passing the authority. And it's where you get the optometrist to summarise to the patient what they should buy. I don't just mean in lens choice, I mean physically taking them to the frames you really want them to look at.

I hope you don't think I've crossed a line there. As this whole article demonstrates, the dispensing optician alone isn't responsible for product sales. Their job is to increase the sale value and close the sale. It's the entire patient journey that ultimately dictates your conversion rate and average dispense value. ●

● **Richard Pakey** is the founder of Independent Practice Growth UK, a practice growth and marketing organisation. He is the author of *It's Time To Fight Back*, now owned by more than 2,300 UK practice owners. You can get a free copy of his book at www.freeopticiansbook.com