



Glazing the capital

Optician visits a small glazing house with big plans in the heart of London

Essilor has had a presence in the UK from as far back as 1881 when the Société des Lunetiers opened its British operation in Hatton Garden, London. It maintained a strong London presence until 1975 when the company moved its offices and production facilities to Thornbury near Bristol, the centre now familiar to UK practitioners.

Perhaps less known and with a low profile, its London Glazing Centre was opened more than 11 years ago to provide a dedicated service within the London area. This facility, until recent years, had strong links with multiple company provision.

Peter O'Donnell, communication manager (lens and glazing), explains that although the centre was relatively unknown, a 'significant investment' two years ago allowed it to expand its reach and service dramatically and the unit has ambitions to grow its operating capabilities.

The centre is able to act as a local glazing and distribution centre, using frame and lens stock from Thornbury, and offering a speedy supply of the final appliance 'to any practice within London's north and south circular ring roads'. The centre has a typical delivery time of 48 hours from receipt of order to final delivery. It employs a team of 'dedicated delivery bikes' that also provide an emergency service, such as when a patient has lost his spectacles and cannot cope without them.

One-off service

Joe Willis, glazing manager London, explains that the centre currently processes around 1,000 orders per week and that the aim is to double this over the coming year. He says one way to achieve this growth is to promote a 'one-off' service for practices when they have extra demand with which they might not be able to cope themselves. This service could also cover times of staff sickness or holiday absence to ensure the practice continues its service to patients as normal. Agreement would be reached for 'a price point that suits'.

Peter O'Donnell (left) and Joe Willis hope to see orders double over the coming year



The Holborn premises: easy access for London-based practitioners

The current team of nine (with one extra due to arrive as demand increases) offer a 'package price' to customers. Having gained some commitment, they review the order value after one month and then set the next month at an appropriate price. The price therefore varies with demand.

By careful monitoring of lens supplies, the centre is able to ensure that stock is available for next day return.

A computer based 'frame to follow' service was introduced four months ago. O'Donnell explains how an order may be made online, printed off and made at the centre ready to pop into a frame ordered at the time of booking, so ensuring a 24-hour delivery including the order of frame.

Raising the profile

Willis was keen to point out that the centre has ambitions beyond increasing its glazing business. Working closely with Vision Care charity, the centre offers voluntary service during quiet times, such as Christmas and bank holidays, holding donated frames and glazing them ready for return. It occasionally also provides such a service for Vision Aid Overseas.

The central London location in Holborn also makes the centre a suitably easy point of access for London-based practitioners and O'Donnell is keen to see the facility used more for training and CET events. He has always encouraged customers to 'drop in' but intends in the coming months to offer CET accredited workshops and seminars based around lenses and optical appliances.

Time will tell if this little known glazing centre, having raised its head above the parapet, will continue to expand with such ambition. ●