



Pictured left to right: Philip Webb, Sarah Thomas, Ian Lucas and Shelley Stubbs

Promoting Transitions VI

What would you do if you were given the opportunity to upgrade all your customers from a clear lens to a Transitions VI lens free of charge for six months? Webb & Lucas of Stafford was given the chance. **Chris Bennett** finds out more

The contest heralded the arrival of Transitions' TVI, the latest generation of variable tint lens last autumn and offered six prizes including the chance to upgrade all lenses from clear to TVI for six months. This seemed too good an opportunity to miss for Sarah Thomas of Webb & Lucas.

Dispensing optician, and former *Optician Award* winner, Thomas was as surprised as anyone when she later learned that Webb & Lucas had won the top prize.

Since then the practice has been working with Transitions Optical to formulate the offer and how it will be presented to customers. When deciding how to mark the launch of its latest lens, Transitions had the option of offering a big prize, as was the case in other European countries, or trying to do something a little more imaginative that would both reward the practice and be a business builder for the category.

By providing a practice with the opportunity to offer Transitions lenses it opens up a number of possibilities. These range from passing on that saving and promoting Transitions

lenses, free of charge, to every patient who walks through the door to doing nothing and simply pocketing the additional cost of each Transitions lens sold. Clearly, the reality would lie somewhere between those two extremes.

Webb & Lucas and Transitions came up with a range of ideas that will run through the six-month offer period. These are designed to promote Transitions throughout the six months, but most patients will be paying for the upgrade to Transitions other than in the six weeks to St Valentine's Day.

From January 2 until February 14 all patients will be offered a free upgrade to Transitions lenses. Transitions lens upgrades will be offered at no cost to all children purchasing frames throughout the rest of the six months.

A voucher for a free pair of single-vision, stock tinted, lenses will be offered to those ordering a pair of Transitions lenses. The lenses have to go into a frame purchased from the practice and the offer has to be used between December 1 and the end of May 2009.

Alternatively, the patient can get £50 off the cost of Drivewear or polarised lenses. This runs throughout the rest of

the six-month period.

Customers ordering spectacles funded by an NHS voucher will be offered an upgrade from clear to Transitions for £10. Again, this runs throughout the rest of the six months.

For Transitions Optical the promotion serves as the perfect test-bed to find out how and why practices recommend Transitions lenses, how much of a difference that proactivity makes to conversion and how much of an issue the cost of Transitions lenses is to their choice.

Busy independent

Webb & Lucas is a traditional independent optician in a busy county town which prides itself on offering a quality optical service to a wide range of patients. It uses a range of national and local lens suppliers and has its own on-site glazing lab run by technician Heather Lunn.

The practice displays around 800 frames ranging from Fendi, Gucci and Armani through to budget ranges and has a welcoming feel and friendly staff.

Philip Webb, Ian Lucas and Shelley Stubbs are the optometrists. Lunn, the technician has also completed her first year of training at Anglia to become



Looking at lenses

a dispensing optician. She also advises customers on frames and lenses. The reception team, who secured a nomination for an *Optician Award* in 2008, are Lesley, Kate, Jane, Sarah, Pat and Lesley.

The practice has a patient base of 16,054 and runs three consulting rooms, with two optometrists working at all times. It is involved in shared care schemes with the local primary care trust and offers services such as low vision, audiology and colour overlays. Thomas says part of her role is building up the fashion side of the business, while a steady flow of new clients arrive in the consulting rooms through word of mouth and local promotional activity.

Within the town there are eight competing practices ranging from the usual high street names, an Asda and a bucket shop.

Service is where Thomas and Lucas say the practice really wins through. Fellow optometrist Stubbs joined the practice as a partner after working there in a job share arrangement. She says patients are sometimes tempted away by offers at other practices but usually end up coming back.

The practice has always taken a patient-centred approach to lenses, says Lucas. He says Thomas keeps the team up to date with all the latest offerings. 'We use them all [suppliers]. We can buy from whoever we like to benefit the patient,' she says.

To date, the optometrists have taken a fairly softly, softly approach to the promotion of products, but Thomas is already an advocate for all types of new lens products and admits to offering Transitions to 'everyone' she sees. This may account for the 25 per cent penetration of Transitions during the summer months.

In the consulting rooms things are different. 'I tend to talk about them [Transitions] if people mention them,' says Lucas, adding quickly that he always wear Transitions lenses himself when in the practice. 'To be fair we don't get that involved in suggesting products,' adds Stubbs.

'We are not a practice that hard sells things to people – we try and give them what is right for them. We operate on a problem-solving approach,' says Lucas.

'We don't train for four years to be told what we have to do. But if Transitions is the best solution then I would tell the patient that,' adds Stubbs.

But in the next six months things are going to change. Lucas says he



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intends to be more proactive and is contemplating putting some Transitions posters in the consulting room and getting across some of the benefits and features of the product.

Over the next six months the practice will try to mention Transitions to everyone who comes in. 'That's the intention, not a guarantee,' says Thomas. 'One of the principal aims is to try and drive some new consumers into the business.'

One of the main ways the practice will be doing this is through powerful window displays and health-related messages such as UV protection for children. All children will be offered Transitions as a free upgrade.

Thomas's window displays have proved popular in the past and the practice is in a busy area of the town. 'The window will drive people in,' says Stubbs.

Building business

Early indications are positive and the customers seem to appreciate the offer appearing just ahead of Christmas and at a difficult economic time. A week into the six months, all but two children have taken up the option of Transitions lenses. The whole practice is excited about the prospect for the next six months and the effect it will have on business.

'I would like to think of it predominantly as a practice-building idea,' says Lucas. He is hoping that the promotion will build business for the future, produce extra custom for the practice and offer patients a good deal. The practice is being supported

by Transitions through training and bespoke point of sale materials, and Thomas seems certain the outcome will be positive for both practice and the patients. Luca Conte, UK business manager for Transitions Optical, said: 'The Transitions VI launch has been a great success story and the response to the competition was fantastic. The aim of the questions in the competition was to get entrants to read through the material provided and really learn about what Transitions VI has to offer patients. Webb & Lucas has shown real initiative in the way it will be using the prize to its own, and its patients' benefit.

'It will be interesting over the six months to see how patients respond to the various promotions that will be rolled out in store. Webb & Lucas is the first practice to receive one-to-one training with our new product consultants ensuring everyone is aware of the benefits of Transitions lenses and they are recommended to all clear lens wearing patients, and so increase dispensing values.

'Transitions Optical would like to thank everyone who took part in the competition, and congratulations to all six of the winning practices.'

Thomas says Webb & Lucas doesn't see its customers as walking purses but Transitions lenses can benefit patients. 'If we are prescribing Transitions it's because we believe in them.'

And for the practice? 'We don't do two-for-ones – we are very much service and quality led. Anything that makes us more proactive has got to be good.' ●