YOU’RE BETTER THAN THAT

You can’t get through an entire issue of your favorite gossip or style magazine without being inundated with your favorite celebrity visiting an exotic location or enjoying a day out and about in Hollywood pictured with the latest sexy and stylish sunglasses. In fact, if you think about the world of celebrities, rock stars, athletes and fashion models, you start realizing how much exposure we all have to sunglasses.

We see athletes at the ballpark wearing active sunwear, famous actors wearing designer dresses while donning their fashion sunglasses on the red carpet, or a model walking down the runway showcasing the latest clothing collections while topping it off with the world’s most important accessory: sunwear. And I don’t recall seeing a rock star or hip-hop artist cruising around in their latest video not wearing sweet shades. Sunglasses are advertised all around us.

Why are private practice independents missing out on this market share? If you polled the team members in your practice, how many of them are wearing polarized sunwear? I would hope most or all of them are. You wouldn’t put your kids in gas station sunglasses, right? Then why shouldn’t your clients wear them? We supposedly are the experts, knowing all about polarized sunwear and the harmful rays, and how they affect the health of the eye. We are the trusted ones. Why are so many consumers heading to the Internet to buy sunglasses, oftentimes looking for celebrity-driven sunglass brands? It’s time for independents to focus on selling premium sunglasses at their optical shops. But you have to approach things a bit differently than you’re used to.

BABY, I’M AMAZED BY YOU

Here is some homework for you: Visit optometric websites in your area and around major cities across the U.S. See if I get the website recipe correct: Here is a picture of our practice. Here’s our mission statement and why we are family-friendly. Meet and greet our doctors. Here are lots of definitions of eye diseases and services we offer. We accept the following insurances. We have lots of contact lens options which
you can purchase on our website. These are the names of some frames we sell. Fill out these forms before your visit. Here is our location and phone number. And yes, we have sunglasses too.

If you want to be one of the few practices that sell a high percentage of polarized prescription sunglasses, you need to change your website formula. Declare your optical shop as the only relevant sunglass destination in your area. Own it. Sunwear can no longer be considered an afterthought. You can make room on your website by clearing out and condensing your main topics. Clients don’t need your definitions of eye disease and conditions. No matter what you have on your site, they are going straight to Google when they get home to research relevant eye conditions. Think about how you may condense your website, because I’m going to give you an assignment: Dedicate a whole (big) section of your website for sunwear. And yes, you’re going to have to get used to and utilize social media, the place where your existing and potential clients spend their entire day.

I’m still completely befuddled and amused by the amount of practices that almost take pride in having nothing to do with social media:

“I’m a doctor, not a car salesperson. We do things different around here. My patients are loyal to me and all of our referrals come from word of mouth. Also, we are a clinic, treating eye diseases among other eye health-related conditions. If we are active on social media, it will cheapen our brand. Our opticians don’t even sell many sunglasses here. We are a medical clinic, not a retail-focused shop. Sure, we’ll have a small Facebook icon on the very bottom of our website page. But we’re not going to take our opticians off the floor to play on social media. We will use premade cookie-cutter templates that other eyecare professionals use. We will educate our patients on eye health months and share interesting tidbits about the eye. That will suffice.”

This recipe has worked very well in the past. Remember when all of your patients bought their glasses from you? You’d bring them out of the exam room and into the optical, and they’d get their new glasses and maybe a pair of shades from you. No competition. Now you are doing whatever you can to get your patients to stay at your optical shop. They’re asking for their prescriptions, their PDs and running out of your door. It’s time to change your approach. Social media is going to get you back into the game in becoming a reputable (and profitable) sunglass destination. It’s fun, effective, and it’s all about connecting with existing and potential clients.

After you’ve succumbed to the thought of using social media to enhance your sunglass sales, it’s time to dive in. Let’s explore some ways to promote sunglasses while being effective on social media.

You’re familiar with Facebook by now. It’s where you see pictures of your old high school classmates taking pictures of a meal they are eating right now. You also see pictures of your kids/grandkids playing in the big game. You’re “liking” and “sharing” like mad while holding your smartphone, tablet and laptop anticipating what wonder will pop up next. It’s a part of our culture for sure. People are staring down at their phones at the mall, the restaurant, the concert and definitely at your private practice. Even if you’re not on Facebook yet, you know about it and know how people get sucked in it for hours.

Use this to your advantage. If they’re staring at everything in their “feed,” have them stare at your optical and especially your sunglass destination. They won’t be interested in eye diseases, and they already know how trustworthy your optical is. So focus on sunwear. In fact, I believe for every five posts that you make, three of the posts should showcase sunglasses. And it should all be client-driven.

Make sure to use at least one iPad (you’ll need tablets to do this effectively) in your optical shop dedicated to taking photos of your clients. Take photos of clients trying on sunglasses. Take photos of clients picking up their sunglasses. Have them take selfies... they love this. Take a video of their excitement, capturing that “ah-ha” moment of putting on polarized sunwear for the first time. You know how cool you are, but when your clients are doing the bragging for you, your credibility goes much further.

When you take a picture of your client “Kim” wearing her new shades, have her sign a model release form. (These are easily found online, and clients love to see themselves as “models.”) Then post it to Facebook. She will go home and “like” it. All of her friends will comment on how cute and stylish they are. Her grandmother will gush over her and will share the photo with all of her friends. All of a sudden this photo goes viral in your community. You’ve received new likes on your Facebook page, and all are happy. They all know now that you sell rockin’ shades at your optical.

**INSTAGRAM**

Instagram works a bit like Facebook, but it is all about the photos and hashtags. If you’re unsure what hashtags (#) are, ask anyone between the ages of 15 and 35. Hashtags makes it easier for people to find you on Instagram.

Let’s pretend for a moment that the name of your independent practice is Rave Eye Care (REC for short). For instance, if you take that picture of Kim, you may consider the following hashtags: #sunglass, #sunglasses, #fashion, #RaveEyeCare, #RaveEyeCare #MiamiJim, #RayBan, #Oakley, #Costa, #FaceaFace, #SALT. #KateSpade, (whichever brand she purchased from you), etc. Anyone around the world who is looking for any of those hashtags, will find your Instagram feed. They will then have the opportunity to like and share your photo.

Instagram is also effective for running cool sunglass campaigns, without you
spending one cent. Maybe you start your very own optical hashtag: the “Where I Wear My Sunnies” campaign. If Rave Eye Care wanted to show off their patients wearing their shades, the hashtag for the campaign might be #RECsunnies. You can encourage your clients to take photos wherever they are and to use your #RECsunnies Instagram hashtag.

You will then see your clients wearing your shades on their boat, their sunny vacation, their trip to the beach or just strolling along your downtown area. You could then make it a contest. Pick your favorite #RECsunnies Instagram photo, and the winner could win a pair of plano sunglasses. Then take a photo of them picking up their new pair. Hashtag it (#RECsunnies) and then share on your Instagram feed and Facebook page. The likes and shares happen all over again as you start becoming an optical destination for the latest and greatest fashionable sunglasses.

**TWITTER**

You can hook up all of your social media channels through Hootsuite, a platform that coordinates all of your social media posts. For example, whenever you take a photo of a client, you can send the photo simultaneously to your Facebook, Instagram and Twitter feeds. In an instant, all of your feeds will be updated with the photo and your desired hashtags, and will reach your client base using their favorite social media platform. Kim’s photo will be liked and shared by her grandmother on Facebook, will be liked and shared by her girlfriends on Instagram and will be “retweeted” and liked on Twitter from her hip nephew.

Now you’re starting to reach friends of friends of friends, and all will be exposed to your amazing sunglass collection. Your investment to this point: $0.

**LIVE STREAMING**

One of the most effective forms of social media and the most under-utilized platform is live streaming, which I refer to as “Live Branding.” Companies like Meerkat and Periscope, two of the current major players in this social media platform, allow people from all over the world to connect through live video while having the capability to interact with viewers by asking questions and leaving comments. Rock stars live streaming their sold-out shows have used live streaming. It has been used by CEOs of major companies to connect with fans. Celebrities have even used it as they are hanging out at their houses. What a great way to see how they live and what they’re thinking.

Live streaming is raw and is very live, which is why some gravitate to it and others run away as fast as they can. I love live streaming and think it can be used by the three Os to educate and sell products.

Doctors can use it as an interview format to talk about dry eye and what they’re doing to offer the latest technology to help their patients. While they’re sharing their expertise, patients have the opportunity to ask questions and comment about the interview/lecture.

In the optical world, live streaming can be utilized greatly to enhance sunwear education and promote sales.

When was the last time a sunglass rep visited your store? They spend their time talking about the latest releases and technology, and answer any questions you may have.

What if you live streamed the interaction for your patients? “Hey, we are visiting with our rep Patrick from Oakley. We are going to give you a sneak peek into the new collection and will be taking your feedback of which pieces of this sunwear collection you’d like to see at Rave Eye Care.” Your clients are engaged by having ownership in which frames are brought in to your shop. They are also educated on this sunglass line and why you carry it. They ask your optical team as well as the rep all the questions they want to know about Oakley sunglasses.

Is your rep camera shy? Why not live stream your next sunwear trunk show? “Today we are hosting a Maui Jim trunk show live from Rave Eye Care. We’re excited to show you the entire Maui Jim collection, and remember, there’s still time to pop over to try on a beautiful new pair of shades while taking advantage of our special pricing for the event!”

You might even live stream your optical team giving a tour of your optical and focusing on your fashion collection of sunwear. The ideas are endless.

Live streaming does a few things for your brand. You’re able to show clients your sunglass collection, while getting a feel for what your optical brand is all about. You’re able to show them why you’re the experts on sunwear in your area. You get live testimonials from clients attending the event. Best thing? You’ll be able to record your live stream and put it on your YouTube channel, as well as the sunwear-dedicated section of your website, where that video will join photos and photos of your clients reinforcing your brand.

**AND THEN...**

Running out of ideas or time to come up with posts about sunwear? Consider some of these topics:

**Kids:** Focus on the importance of kids’ protection—take photos of the doctors’ and teams’ kids wearing sunglasses on their bike, at the beach or trying them on in your optical. You’ll connect with your patients better if you put these photos on your site (and use them as POP) versus just another model posing in the shades.

**Contests:** Are you trying to grow your audience (likes and follows) on your social media platforms? Consider a running contest to give away sunglasses for free. “Every person who likes or shares our Facebook page will be entered in our contest to win a free pair of shades. This contest will run for one month... start liking and sharing now!”

Give away one free pair of sunglasses each month for four consecutive months (March to June), and watch your Facebook, Insta-
gram and Twitter followers grow.

Voting: Host one sunwear trunk show in May, June, July and August. Have your social media followers decide which trunk show should be first, etc. They have ownership over the choice and will make sure to stop by your event when their favorite collection is featured.

Testimonials: Have your happy clients share video testimonials on your YouTube channel. Or maybe they’ll feel more comfortable writing something up for you which could be displayed on your Facebook page and website. Again, this is all client-driven.

Sunwear trivia: Which celebrity is shown wearing Ray-Ban on this week’s issue of Us Weekly? Which sunglasses line is loved by fishing experts, especially off the Florida coasts? Why are polarized sunglasses recommended as the best option for protecting your eyes from glare? Pick a small prize for the winner(s).

As you can see, social media can be fun and highly valuable. It’s all about showcasing your products and your clients. Give clients a say and feature them on your social media platform to engage others while connecting with them in an effective way. Seems more exciting than glaucoma awareness month... Although focusing on eye diseases can be important for clients to know (and you can definitely still post about glaucoma education), this is not the main idea for client-driven social media interactions and connections.

SAVE THE WEBSITES

Let’s get back to that website of yours. Hopefully you understand the importance of showcasing sunwear and not treating it as an afterthought. You’ll create an entire section of your website totally dedicated to sunwear, which will feature tons of photos and galleries of your patients loving your sunglasses. You’ll share recorded live streams of your rep visits and trunk shows.

Written testimonials from your clients will be prominent. You’ll educate your clients about the importance of polarization and protecting kids’ eyes, because you ARE the expert. You’ll even share any second pair discounts that may apply to sunglass purchases. All in all, the majority of your sunglass section on your website should be client photos. Remember—more pictures, less words.

Add the convenience of actually selling sunwear on your website. Show pictures that you’ve taken of the sunglasses displayed at your shop. Be careful when using logos on your site. Definitely don’t display logos that when clicked on will lead your clients away from your site and to the site of the sunglass manufacturer. Oftentimes they may have a buy one, get one deal, or will show sunglasses that may not be available, and sometimes they will show prices that may be lower than yours. I’ve also experienced pop-up ads for competing online retailers convincing clients to buy them cheaper, just one click away.

SAY CHEESE

When clients do make it in to your optical shop, make it an experience for them, an extension of your social media campaign. Consider purchasing a green screen for your optical. You can find green screens, software and some lights online for decent prices. When clients pick up their new sunglasses, they will be able to pose in front of the green screen. Using the software, the patients can then choose their background. Maybe they are at the beach, attending a red carpet event, skiing down the slopes or on a safari with your sunglasses. “Wanna get away? Visit Rave Eye Care and travel all around the world in your new #RECsunnies!”

BUT SERIOUSLY... DON’T

• DON’T worry about your optician (or another team member) taking the lead on your social media campaign. They brand themselves (think about that) and want to do a great job advocating for your optical. Participate in the posts as a learning experience.

• DON’T give up on your social media campaign after a week/month/year. It takes a long time to build relationships and connect with your client base. Be patient. Good things will happen.

• DON’T be afraid of errors. It will happen. It’s how you respond; make it an opportunity to learn and become better.

• DON’T overlook sunglasses on your website. Just because you’re not selling a ton of sunwear currently doesn’t mean you shouldn’t give sunglasses a featured spot on your website.

• DON’T be stubborn about joining social media platforms because you feel it may cheapen your medical brand. Accept that you are also in retail and the best way to connect with clients and be more profitable with your products is to be active on social media.

YOUR OPTICAL ROCKS!

Now you have your own community of celebrities, athletes, models and rock stars. They’re coming to you for sunglasses because you’ve shown them you are the destination where exciting things happen with sunwear. They’re coming to you because 20 percent of your optical inventory is dedicated to sunglass. They’re paying a premium price for a premium product from their trusted experts in sunglass. They are coming to you because they’re connected to you through their friends and families. They’re coming to you because you offer convenience on your website.

Promote your sunglass sales through your social media presence and utilize your website to further connect with your clients. Two percent? The three Os are to going to grow that this year. LIKE and SHARE that!
SELF-ASSESSMENT EXAMINATION

1. Dedicate a whole (big) section of your website for:
   a. Glaucoma awareness
   b. Eye disease definitions
   c. Sunwear
   d. Brand logos

2. For every five posts that private practices post on Facebook, ________ of these posts should showcase sunglasses.
   a. One
   b. Two
   c. Three
   d. Four

3. When your ______ are doing the bragging for you, your credibility goes much further.
   a. Clients
   b. Neighbors
   c. Parents
   d. Opticians

4. When you take a picture of your clients, make sure they:
   a. Tilt their head when they smile
   b. Sign a model release form
   c. Wear their glasses
   d. Brush their teeth

5. With social media, remember more ________, less ________.
   a. Photos, words
   b. Likes, shares
   c. Time online, time with clients
   d. Time, productivity

6. Consider purchasing a ________ for your optical.
   a. Bigger display
   b. Measuring device
   c. Television
   d. Green screen

7. Declare your optical shop as the only:
   a. Place to adjust eyewear
   b. Optical that sells soft serve ice cream
   c. Relevant sunglass destination in your area

8. Who are the three “Os”?
   a. Opticians, orthodontists, optometrists
   b. Oncologists, opticians, ophthalmologists
   c. Orthopedists, optometrists, opticians
   d. Optometrists, ophthalmologists, opticians

9. If you think about the world of celebrities, rock stars, athletes and fashion models, you start realizing how much:
   a. Money they actually have
   b. Exposure we all have to sunglasses
   c. They do advertisements
   d. They are like you and me

10. You wouldn’t put kids in:
    a. Gas station sunglasses
    b. Fashionable eyewear
    c. An exam chair
    d. Your reception area

11. Which of these is NOT included in most website recipes?
    a. Phone number and location
    b. Forms to fill out prior to your visit
    c. An entire page devoted to sunglasses
    d. Your mission statement

12. The hard cost of a social media sunwear sales campaign includes all of the following except:
    a. Dollars to purchase advertising space
    b. Facebook account
    c. Instagram photographs
    d. Tweets and/or Facebook posts

13. Clients are going straight to ________ to research relevant eye conditions.
    a. Their encyclopedias
    b. Google
    c. A dictionary
    d. Your website

14. Instagram is all about ________ and ________.
    a. Consistency and bragging
    b. Retweets and websites

15. How much does it cost to sign up for social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.)?
    a. $0
    b. $50
    c. $100
    d. $1,000

16. ________ allows people from all over the world to connect through live video.
    a. Instagram
    b. Twitter
    c. Facebook
    d. Live streaming

17. What percent of your optical inventory should be dedicated to sunwear?
    a. 2 percent
    b. 10 percent
    c. 20 percent
    d. 30 percent

18. According to a recent study conducted by VisionWatch, the three Os claimed ________ of all sunglass sales.
    a. 2 percent
    b. 10 percent
    c. 20 percent
    d. 30 percent

19. Which is the place where your existing and potential clients spend their entire day?
    a. The beach
    b. Shopping online
    c. Your office
    d. Social media

20. One tablet in your optical shop should be dedicated to:
    a. Taking photos of your clients
    b. Taking PD measurements
    c. Searching online for sunglasses
    d. Your practice website