What does your contact lens practice have in common with a giant online retailer? Even though your business models may differ substantially, Amazon.com, just like you, is focused on delivering a positive customer experience, which is a proven business-builder. From the quality of the goods it sells to efficiencies related to packaging and delivery, Amazon.com uses all of its formidable resources to find out what customers want. In fact, during management meetings, CEO Jeff Bezos often leaves an empty chair at the conference table for “the most important person in the room,” the customer (Anders, 2012). This relentless pursuit of customer satisfaction has paid off. The company once again led the online retail category — and consistently places in the top 10 overall — in the University of Michigan’s 2015 American Customer Satisfaction Index.

Contact lens practitioners may not have the means to conduct research on the scale of an Amazon.com, but you can supplement your own efforts to make meaningful connections with patients between visits — via Facebook, Twitter, and the like — by evaluating market research data that helps to define the patient opportunities that exist in your contact lens practice.

VISION CORRECTION IN THE UNITED STATES

An estimated 174 million U.S. teens and adults currently wear vision correction, and that number is expected to increase to 192 million by 2025. Of particular note is the presbyopic opportunity that exists as the 65+ age group is expected to increase significantly during that time (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015a).

More than 47 million teens and adults who need vision correction wear contact lenses, and, based on population projections, that number is expected to increase to 50.3 million throughout the next 10 years (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015a). This predicted increase in contact lens wearers is good news for practitioners, and even better news is that advances in contact lens technology are keeping pace with this practice growth opportunity, particularly in the multifocal category.

Of interest is data showing that the type of vision correction a person uses directly correlates with his or her age. Currently, 77% of contact lens wearers are 13 to 44 years old; however, after age 45 eyeglasses dominate the market (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015a). Remarkably, only 9% of adults age 45 and older wear contact lenses despite the level of interest in contact lenses reported by this presbyopic age group (Figure 1) (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015b). Interest in contact lenses among people who are wearing eyeglasses is strongest among those with presbyopia and this interest is primarily motivated by convenience and eye health. Today’s innovations in contact lenses offer a great opportunity to capitalize on this strong interest.

Interest in Contact Lenses is High in the Presbyopic Age Groups

Very/somewhat interested in multifocal contact lenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>16%</td>
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Figure 1. Among adults ages 45+ requiring multifocal vision correction, interest in contact lenses is high. Even among those ages 65+, there is some interest in contact lenses (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015b).
In other words, even though the highest projected increase in the general population needing vision correction occurs in the presbyopic age group, and despite rising interest in multifocal contact lenses, contact lens utilization drops significantly after age 44. This is where opportunity intersects with innovation (Figure 2), as today's advanced multifocal contact lenses represent significant potential for maximizing practice growth in the next decade.

In contrast, eye care practitioners (ECPs) seem to be selective in recommending soft multifocal contact lenses to their patients (Figure 3). Only 15% of ECPs report that they present multifocal contact lenses enthusiastically to their patients, whereas 48% of ECPs present the lenses with warnings about their downsides before patients have even tried them (Jobson Optical Research, 2015).

WHY PATIENTS SELECT A PARTICULAR LENS BRAND

Comfort, vision quality, eye health, and an eyecare professional’s recommendation are the most important considerations for more than 7 in 10 patients when selecting a contact lens brand (Figure 4) (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015a). People with astigmatism or presbyopia tend to rate quality of vision most important, while most new contact lens wearers (those wearing lenses for less than a year) are likely to choose a lens based on their doctor’s recommendation or their familiarity with a brand (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015a). Also important to new wearers is a lens that is recommended as “good for new patients” and described as “the newest technology.”

Patients look to their eyecare professionals to help them maintain their ocular health and to guide them toward the appropriate vision correction. These statistics underscore the key information that practitioners and the office team should communicate about the attributes of the contact lenses they recommend, and that they should continue to discuss specific attributes to ensure continued contact lens success. Whether patients are experienced or new contact lens wearers, they trust their eyecare professionals to educate them about their options so they can confidently choose the lenses that will deliver vision quality.

GALLUP STUDY

Figure 2. Current Type of Primary Vision Correction by Age: This graphic shows the spike in the percentage of vision-corrected adults age 45+ wearing eyeglasses only and the corresponding drop in the percentage of contact lens wearers in the same age group (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015a).

Figure 3. ECP approach to soft multifocal candidate selection (Jobson Optical Research, 2015).
INSIGHTS ON PROSPECTIVE CONTACT LENS WEARERS

An estimated 46.6 million teens and adults can be classified as prospective contact lens wearers — people who currently wear eyeglasses but are interested in trying contact lenses — and based on population projections, that number will rise by 3.2 million by 2025 (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015a). The projected growth of the 65+ age group during this time frame further underscores the importance of lens options that address the vision-correction needs of older adults, primarily presbyopia, but also contact lens-related dryness.

Among contact lens wearers, more than 80% wear eyeglasses either part-time or as their primary means of vision correction (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015a). Practitioners should consider the possibility that these individuals are wearing eyeglasses because their contact lenses are falling short of their performance needs. This is an important avenue to explore because numerous contact lens options are available to address a wide range of patient needs. It is also important to ensure that patients’ eyeglasses are updated and meeting their needs.

Although cost is an important consideration for patients who need vision correction, contact lens wearers want their eyecare practitioners to share information about advances in lens technology (Rah et al., 2015). Whether they wear eyeglasses or contact lenses, patients are eager to learn what is new, and they appreciate a practitioner who takes a fresh look at their visual needs and educates them about the latest options.

PERCEPTIONS OF CONTACT LENSES VS. EYEGLASSES

A majority of vision-corrected consumers view contact lenses as equal to or better than eyeglasses overall. Improved appearance tops the list of advantages; however, in addition to appearance, many prospective wearers focus on the advantages of contact lenses for fitting their lifestyle and providing comfort and sharp vision correction (Figure 5).

When asked to name the primary disadvantages of wearing contact lenses, the number one reason prospective wearers cite is cost (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015a). The value that innovative contact lens technology can bring to appearance, lifestyle, comfort, and vision should be key communication points to reduce cost concerns. For example, someone who has been emmetropic all of her life and now needs presbyopic correction may be more than willing to give up the hassle — not to mention the aging appearance — of readers for comfortable all-day correction with multifocal contact lenses.

Another option that is sometimes overlooked is part-time contact lens wear, which is a cost-effective way for many patients to enjoy the benefits of this modality. Learning that contact lenses and eyeglasses are not mutually exclusive, patients may appreciate having a choice for specific occasions or activities.

RECAPTURING DROPOUTS, OVERCOMING BARRIERS

One in five people who now wear only eyeglasses report that they had worn contact lenses at some point in their past (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015a). The largest groups who are likely to have worn contact lenses in the past are people with astigmatism or presbyopia (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015a). Presbyopic patients wearing monovision or multifocal contact lenses are prime candidates for discontinuing contact lenses (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015a).

Reasons Prospective Wearers Rate Contact Lenses as Better than Eyeglasses

- Appearance
- Fits Lifestyle
- Comfort
- Provide Sharp Vision

Figure 5. Understanding what is important to prospective contact lens wearers can guide in-office discussions (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015a).
HOW ARE YOUR PATIENTS HEARING ABOUT CONTACT LENSES?

By Gina Wesley, OD, MS

The proportion of contact lens wearers who request a specific brand of lenses has more than tripled (from 7% to 24%) since 2003, likely fueled by more widespread access to the Internet along with an increase in direct-to-consumer advertising. In fact, a consumer’s knowledge of a contact lens brand is just as likely to have come from Internet sources as from eye-care professionals (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015).

When it comes to education about contact lenses, the disconnect between consumers and eye-care professionals widens in the 45+ age group. Most people who know they need correction for presbyopia are likely to be aware of bifocal or progressive lens eyeglasses, but just under half are aware of contact lens options to correct presbyopia.

Few of those requiring multifocal vision correction and aware of bifocal and multifocal contact lenses have received a recommendation for these types of lenses from their eye-care professionals. In fact, most eyeglass wearers interested in wearing contact lenses who have discussed contact lenses with their eye-care professionals say they, the patients, initiated the discussion.

The eye-care practitioner’s recommendation plays a key role in a patient’s choice of vision correction, which is why understanding the motivations of prospective contact lens wearers is so important. In addition, developing engagement strategies and positive habits, such as advancing the lens material and design knowledge of staff members, to identify former lens wearers and those considering dropping out helps us create and maintain a robust contact lens practice.

REFERENCE


DIGITAL DEVICES: THEY’RE NOT JUST FOR TEENS

While the incidence of needing near- or reading correction has been stable, the need for correction for mid-range distances has gradually increased, possibly a result of today’s digital device-focused lifestyle. Overall, U.S. teens and adults spend an average of 6.1 hours per day on their digital devices, and that number increases by 1 hour among 25 to 44 year olds. Patients appreciate eye-care professionals who are sensitive to these needs, particularly as they approach the age of presbyopia (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015).

REFERENCE


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Daily Average Hours Spent on Digital Devices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13-24</td>
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<td>5.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>4.4</td>
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Emerging presbyopes are using digital devices more hours of the day than teens (Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015).
GALLUP STUDY

Continued from p.16
2015a). With advancements in contact lens materials and designs and high interest among current eyeglass wearers, the opportunity to recapture dropouts is great.

Discomfort and too much hassle are most frequently cited as reasons for discontinuing contact lens wear (Richdale et al, 2007; Multi-sponsor Surveys, Inc., 2015). Difficulty inserting and removing lenses, as well as time-consuming lens care and cleaning are also commonly reported as major factors for discontinuing lens wear.

These factors point to a significant opportunity for contact lens practitioners to educate and correct misperceptions among patients. By recognizing the characteristics of potential dropouts and their reasons for discontinuing lens wear, practitioners can implement intervention strategies and dialogues to increase success with contact lenses.

CREATE A PATIENT-CENTRIC PRACTICE

The “empty chair” Jeff Bezos uses to represent Amazon.com’s customers may have a double meaning for eyecare professionals. It may represent your most important customers, your patients, but it also may represent the potential new patients you have yet to see. The information in this article provides key insights into current and future trends among people needing vision correction, revealing new opportunities to help you create a more patient-centric practice.

REFERENCES


Dr. Wesley is a private practitioner in Medina, Minn. She is a consultant/advisor to Bausch + Lomb, Revolution EHR, and Shire.

Ms. Wilson is director of strategic insights at Bausch + Lomb.

Dr. Saxon is director of professional strategy at Bausch + Lomb.