A Novartis Company

The Customer Journey

Touchpoint **eight:** Choosing frames and spectacle lenses

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eleven

Touchpoint **eight:** Choosing frames and spectacle lenses

Touchpoint eight

With an effective handover from Optometrist to Dispenser, the patient will be better informed and keen to hear the Dispenser tell them about the best eyewear options. This does not mean that the Dispenser should start making assumptions as to what will be appropriate eyewear choices for this individual; even if they are correct assumptions. This is because patients will often perceive themselves to be customers when in the dispensing area of the practice, whereas in the consulting room they feel as though they are patients. Whilst the differences may be subtle, it does mean that any recommendations made by the Optometrist are seen as prescriptive and conversely those made by the Dispenser are because they are trying to sell. However, most people enjoy buying, but the majority dislike being sold to. One way to reduce a patient's perception that they are being sold to is to ask questions relating to the way they use their sight and what they want their spectacles to do for them. This will help to clarify the Dispenser's understanding of their needs as an individual and enable the patient to be given an informed choice. Patients handled in this way will leave the practice better informed, as well as feeling that any buying decision that was made was theirs. This approach has been proven to lead to higher dispensing values as well as greater patient satisfaction.

Why people buy

When dispensing it is important to understand that people make buying decisions based on a combination of emotional and logical reasons:

1. It makes them feel good (emotion)
2. It solves a problem (logic)

The aim for the Dispenser must be to satisfy both of these needs for long-term success. These needs can be interpreted as helping the patient to:

1. **Feel** and **look** good (emotion)
2. **See** better (logic)

Successful selling is a combination of identifying and satisfying needs. For this to be perceived as being professional, it is best to advise and recommend the most appropriate options supported by benefits, personalised for the individual. This allows the buyer to make an informed choice, based on the information provided.

It is significant to remember that patients have a choice; therefore, a successful practice will endeavour to differentiate itself by offering, what is perceived to be:

Exceptional… Service

Quality

Value for money

Value for money is not about being the or cheapest, but offering more than the consumer expects. This has as much to do with quality, service and care, as the product itself.

Before considering presentation of the product, reflect on the following:

'People buy people first'

The most effective sales people have the following characteristics;

- Positive attitude
- Enthusiasm
- Likeable personality
- Smart appearance
- Integrity
- Effective communication skills
- Good product knowledge
- Ability to handle objections

The sales model

Whilst the Optometrist will not always be involved in the dispensing and sales processes, their recommendations during the eye examination can be very influential with the patient. After the examination, a personal hand over by the Optometrist to a dispensing colleague, verbally updating clinical circumstances, will show the patient that the practice team are working in harmony, for their benefit.

The Dispenser can now begin to determine the best and most appropriate products to offer the patient. Use a structured approach to do this effectively. The 'Sales Model' will ensure that a logical sequence is followed and nothing is missed.

Stage 1.	Introduction - to build rapport
Stage 2.	Information gathering – to establish patient objectives
Stage 3.	Product presentation – to educate and inform
Stage 4.	Recommendation and advice – to explain options
Stage 5.	Confirm interest – to obtain commitment and finalise the sale

Stage 1. Introduction – building rapport

At first, general conversation should be encouraged to help develop a rapport. This conversation does not have to be directly related to their visit to the practice. Some of a more nervous disposition may require more time before a rapport is established. For others, who may be more businesslike, a lesser amount of general conversation will be needed.

Stage 2. Information gathering – establish objectives

By using specific 'open' questions, an individual's wants and expectations will be revealed. During this stage it is important not to prejudge expectations or jump to conclusions that may be wrong. It is not helpful to ask:

What not to say

***'Did you want a pair of spectacles similar to last time?'* or to ask *'How much do you want to spend?'* unless they say they do not want to spend very much on their new spectacles.**

More useful 'open' questions include:

What not to say

'What do you like (dislike) about your existing glasses?'. 'When do you wear your spectacles most?', 'What sort of frame do you prefer?'.

The information gained from this type of open question will help the Dispenser to identify the most appropriate eyewear product solutions to be presented. When presented effectively, the want of a new pair of spectacles can become a 'need' for a specific combination of frame and lenses. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to convert a customer's 'want' of a pair of spectacles, to be able to see more clearly, into a 'need' for good quality fashion or designer frames with high technology ophthalmic lenses. Of course, additional information gained from the use of patient lifestyle questionnaires, can be discussed at this time.

To help the customer convert their want (of new eyewear) into a need, good product presentation skills are required.

Stage 3. Product presentation – educate and inform

Once the customer's needs and objectives have been confirmed, the most appropriate eyewear product options can be explained. This is best undertaken using features, linked to benefits, personalised for this person as an individual.

It is important to understand the difference between a product's features and benefits.

Features are product details, descriptions, technical information and facts that relate to the individual product and / or service i.e. the spin speed of a washing machine.

Benefits are what the features will do for the person they are being offered to i.e. the higher the spin speed the dryer clothes will be.

Generally, Dispensers are very interested in their products and understand the features very well, but often fail to translate and present the appropriate benefits to the customer. It should be emphasised that patients will purchase 'the best they can afford' if they understand the benefits to them.

Note: It always helps to use visual aids and samples when demonstrating product features and benefits. This will reinforce and add credibility to your presentation.

It is important to utilise these effective sales techniques to:

(a) Educate and inform about product/service features

(b) Personalise to the customer product/service benefits

The following examples demonstrate this concept:

Product	Feature	Benefits
Frame	Spring sides	• Frame stays in shape • Frame remains comfortable
Soft contact lens	Medium water content	• Comfort • Quick adaptation • Flexible wearing times
Glass ophthalmic lens	Higher index	• Thinner, scratch resistant
Mar coating	Anti-reflection coating	• Better appearance • Reduced glare

From these examples it can be seen that each feature has one or more benefits linked to it. The skill is to select the most appropriate feature that will offer the maximum number of benefits for each individual.

By presenting products in this way, it is much easier to help an individual convert their 'want' of a new pair of spectacles into a 'need' for a specific combination of frame and lenses. This same technique can be applied to contact lens products as well.

EXERCISE

Select a range of frames and ophthalmic lenses and write a list of every feature and linked customer benefit for each product. Note: each feature should have at least three benefits.

Product	Feature	Benefits

Stage 4. Recommendations – to advise on options

Generally, customers rely on their Optician to advise and recommend what they feel will be best for them. The practice team should never underestimate the influence that their recommendations will have on the final choice of product purchased.

To reinforce benefits, it may be helpful to use expressions such as:

What to say

'Looking at the benefits (state them), I think soft contact lenses would be best for you. What do you think?' or

'This frame provides these benefits (state them). I think it would be ideal for your needs.', or

'Because of the extra benefits (state them) of high index lenses, many of our customers choose them'.

Note:

(i) With the vast range of spectacle frames, ophthalmic and contact lenses available, it is important that the Dispenser's product knowledge is comprehensive and up-to-date, in order to offer and present products that have the most appropriate features and maximum number of benefits for each individual patient.

(ii) To enable the customer to make an 'informed choice', always point out any 'considerations' or 'balancing features' that may be relevant to a particular product, for example:

> **What to say**
>
> ***'Although anti-reflection coatings offer these benefits, extra care is required to keep them clean'.***
>
> ***'These varifocals have all the benefits I mentioned. However, it may take a little time to adjust fully to wearing them all the time'.***

Using this balanced presentation increases credibility, by being honest (whilst not being negative) and sets expectations at a realistic level, minimising 'problems' later on. Once again, visual aids and samples should be used whenever possible to demonstrate the benefits and balancing factors.

Stage 5. Confirm the sale/obtain commitment

Observation has shown that many practices do all of the hard work, i.e. excellent eye examination, good product presentation, recommendation and advice. Yet they fail to gain the dispensing, as the patient walks away with the prescription to 'look around'.

Often this is due to a difficulty in asking for the order and closing the sale. When the sales model has been used effectively, try the following expressions:

> **What to say**
>
> ***'If I order these today they should be ready for you on (state day)'***
> ***'Shall we go ahead with the order?'***
> ***'Would you like to order these?'***
> ***'How would you like to pay?'***

In some cases when a customer's 'wants' have become 'needs', they often 'close' the sale themselves by asking;

'What's the total cost?'
'How long will they take?'
'That seems to be just what I need'

These expressions are known as 'buying signals' and are an indication of when to close the sale!

> **Customer Journey materials**
> **'Contact lens proactive dispensing mat' (ZCJDISPMAT)**

Handling objections

In reality, it is often the case that the 'Sales model' does not run smoothly. Customers will sometimes say 'No' to the recommendations made and it is easy to jump to the conclusion that price is the prime objection, in every case. However, research shows that this is only true in a minority of cases.

The main reasons people object to recommendations are:

- Disinterest
- Concern
- Inability

Disinterest

Can arise if patients have not been sufficiently motivated by your presentation to agree to the recommendation. To overcome disinterest it is important to:

- Review 'needs' and objectives
- Restate key features and benefits
- Confirm interest
- Restate recommendations
- Confirm action – Ask for the order

It is not always necessary to go back to the beginning of the presentation, only to the point at which disinterest became apparent. This will often be indicated by body language signals i.e. the customer starts looking around the practice and is not concentrating on what is being said.

Usually, when following this strategy there will be a 'buying signal' or indication of interest during the re-presentation. If this does not occur, perhaps there was a failure to identify and personalise fully the main benefits of the frame or lens product's features.

Concern

Some people may be concerned that the product will not do what you claim it can do. This can happen when not enough information has been provided, regarding a product's features and benefits.

Some reasons for concern may include:

- Value for money – is it worth it?
- No guarantee – that it will work and last
- Disbelief – Have you 'oversold'?
- Quality – Have they had a bad experience before?

As with 'Disinterest' the following should be revisited:

- Review needs and objectives
- Re-state key features and benefits
- Confirm interest
- Restate recommendation
- Confirm action - Ask for the order

It is recommended to make use of any visual aids and samples to help reassure the 'concerned' customer. Sometimes the use of a 'third party reference' is helpful, i.e. 'Many of our customers have these lenses and really like them'.

By personalising the restated benefits, it should be easy to overcome the 'concern', as well as supporting the product's quality and value.

Inability

The apparent inability of the customer to make a decision may include issues regarding price, although often there are other reasons why they may feel unable to say 'yes'.

The main reasons for inability are:

- Not the decision maker
- Lack of resource
- 'Smokescreen'

Not the decision maker

Quite simply, some people may not want to, or be able to agree to any recommendation without their parent, partner or friend being present. Perhaps they lack the confidence to make a decision on their own.

Lack of resource

Of course, sometimes customers really cannot afford the 'best' recommendation. It is necessary to handle these situations sensitively. However, when using the upgrading technique, 'better' and/or 'good' product ranges can be offered as 'less expensive options'.

Smokescreen

This is probably the most difficult type of objection to handle. This term is often linked with 'time-wasters'. However, there is usually some underlying reason for their objection. They may be too proud to admit the true reason for not making a decision. The use of 'open' questions should help identify which type of objection it is. Often, it will be found that they are 'not the decision maker' or 'have a lack of resource'. Sometimes, this person just cannot make up their mind!

Alternatively, when someone says that they will have to "think it over" they rarely mean this literally. This is often used as an excuse not to make a decision, or to buy something similar, but perceived to be cheaper elsewhere.

So when someone says, *"I shall have to think it over"*, you should reply, *"I am pleased to hear that. Of course, you don't want to make a decision like this without all the facts. Perhaps we can go over any points that I have not made clear." "Is it the ....?" "Is it the ....?"* and so on until the real reason has been discovered. Each time they answer *"no"*, you ask again regarding another feature or benefit. Finally, they must either admit that everything is acceptable and or they must reveal their true objection. First check that the objection is the final one. *"Apart from that, are you happy with everything else?" "Is that the only thing that is standing between us?"* When they admit that there is no other reason for hesitation, the Dispenser could say: *"Suppose we could satisfy you on that point, would you then agree to go ahead?"* If they agree again that they have no further objection you can answer the question and go ahead with the order.

Summary

It is essential that all objections to your recommendations are handled sensitively otherwise, it may be that no agreement is reached. If the sale is lost everyone is likely to become frustrated. In many instances an objection can arise because the patient or Dispenser misunderstood something that was said.

Upgrading

Nowadays, consumers of all goods and services have a wider choice, but often different levels of quality and value even service available with each product type. By implementing upgrading strategies, practices can, not only offer different and better products and services, they can enhance the quality of customer service and care, as well.

There are three aspects of upgrading which can be applied within the practice;

1. Personal
2. Practice
3. Product

Personal upgrading

All practice staff should demonstrate that they are addressing and meeting customers' needs, with every task they do. At the same time, each member of staff should aim to demonstrate that they are enthusiastic, committed and responsible. Showing these characteristics differentiates a confident and dynamic practice from its competitors.

Enthusiasm really is contagious. It is easier to buy from enthusiastic, friendly staff and a positive attitude naturally 'rubs off' on other members of the practice team.

Commitment – The practice team must show customers that they want to do their best for them, to gain their commitment. The visit to the practice becomes a more positive experience (leading to a greater number of better quality dispensings). One way of showing commitment is by providing high quality information to patients and customers.

Using information acquired from customers enables specific objectives and needs to be met encouraging customers to feel 'special'. As customers' confidence increases, they feel more comfortable about spending money in and become more loyal to the practice. Consequently, recommendations increase to family, friends and colleagues.

Responsibility – The practice understandably expects a responsible attitude from all staff. The ideal way to ensure this is to maintain a positive attitude within the workplace. This will ensure:

- Happy patients/customers
- Good team spirit
- Job satisfaction
- Improved business results

Responsibility should encourage all members of the team to ask themselves…

How could I do this:

- Better?
- Quicker?
- Smarter?
- More effectively?

Practice upgrading

It is not always the recently refitted or refurbished practices that are the most profitable as businesses. Attention to detail in tidiness and cleanliness are generally enough to ensure high standards. Even moderate investments in superficial redecoration and cleanliness can be sufficient to 'keep up appearances'.

Methods of improving the practice further, can be taken from the ideas and opinions gained from regular staff meetings. This forum is ideal for improving practice team working, generating ideas, and encouraging everyone to be more involved.

Product upgrading

When the practice looks as good as possible and the staff team are working to high standards, it becomes much easier to offer and have customers accept better quality products.

'Tier-pricing' or 'top down selling' are both common expressions used in retail environments to describe product upgrading. Customers are used to selecting products and services in this way. Every retail or service orientated business has examples of this strategy.

Therefore, most customers expect choice and different products available to them to meet their needs in different ways and with different prices.

Once an individual's needs have been determined, it is usually possible to identify three or more options in most product groups. For example;

Ophthalmic lenses

1. CR39,
2. CR39 with AR coating
3. High index resin with AR Coating

The same can be done with frames and contact lenses. The use of upgrading techniques can encourage the purchase of the best and most appropriate products the each individual can afford.

Do note that it is not your responsibility to decide how much an individual can or cannot afford. Do not let appearances fool you into believing someone can afford to spend more or less because of the clothes they are wearing. If an individual does not wish to spend money on the best options for them, this time, at least they will leave the practice better informed and next time they may choose them.

Upgrading model

Maximise sales by offering three levels of product.

Good Better Best

Each product 'step' should demonstrate differences in performance, quality, and price. Because of this, each level of product offered will have different numbers of **features** linked to personalised **benefits**, with the higher priced options offering more.

To use the product upgrade technique successfully, the 'best' product will always be shown first. The better and good products can be shown when it is evident that a successful sale cannot be achieved from the best range, or as a comparison to show how much better the 'best' product is.

If it is difficult to decide where to begin, when selecting the best frame or lens type for an individual, the rule is: 'if in doubt, aim high'. The patient will always appreciate being offered the best, even if they cannot afford it. Of course, it is easier to offer a less expensive option, when starting at the top, with high value ranges, but more difficult to move to a higher value option, when starting from lower budget ranges.

Upgrading – remember the add-ons

After the customer has chosen a product, think of the opportunities of offering additional products and services. Most are willing to consider linked purchases after the main product has been sold to them.

Examples in other businesses include:

- batteries with small electronic goods
- shirts/blouses with suits
- polish with shoes
- extended warranty
- side orders in restaurants

Whilst we may find the offering of such add-ons irritating, it is probably because they have not been offered correctly that makes us feel this way. Often practices overlook the many opportunities they have to sell add-ons and extras. If handled appropriately, these sales do not have to appear too 'pushy' or salesperson-like. Examples of these may include:

- Coatings and tints
- Contact lens solutions
- Sunglasses (prescription and for CL wearers)
- All accessories
- Insurances & care schemes

However, if you are uncomfortable selling some of these extras this way, include the most relevant options in the 'best' option when starting at the top.

Action Plan

This action plan is likely to be a product training programme to ensure every Dispenser is confident using features linked to personalised benefits for all the products and services your practice offers. The more confident use of 'upgrading' should be discussed as well.

1. . . . .
2. . . . .
3. . . . .
4. . . . .