

Brand Theater...

It's part of your design, but do you have the right ticket?

Do a quick search for articles on optical design and you'll find many; and many will concur that the trend for optical design is more toward sleek and minimalistic, with displays that are consistent in their look but display differently for select price points. For example, higher priced frames should be given more space, such as open shelves, whereas lower priced frames should be displayed closely and on a different display system such as individual frame holders. When you give more space to a frame this tells the patient it is more of a luxury product. A successful design formula includes minimalist décor which highlights eyewear collections with clever displays.

However, there is an opportunity largely overlooked in the design of an optical. It's called the "brand theater." Every day I work with doctors' practices and I help put together their "brand theater" with merchandising components such as signage and graphics. More often than not, when I visit a practice I see those merchandising components still sitting in the shipping box; not on the "stage" for which they're made.

When a patient comes into your practice they should immediately be made aware of the products you carry, and be able to follow visual elements to them. Today, visual is traveling faster than words (think "photos before forks" - we take photos of our food before dining), so start with branding boards that list the top selling brands you carry to draw the patient into the optical.

Sense of sight provides 83% of human information and Point-of-Sale (POS) remains the primary visual contact for the optical. Your patients are just a Google search away from understanding the products, services and frames you carry, so give them the instant gratification of buying on the spot in your optical and provide the best patient experience possible to them.

With optical retailing gradually falling in line with fashion retailing (I call it "O-tailing"), enhancing the patient shopping experience is key. Your optical and reception is your patient's first and last impression of you and your practice. Doctors may boast about their latest equipment (which is usually not their biggest profit center); meanwhile the front of the practice looks like it's been lost in a time warp. Patients won't be able to tell if you have the top of the line OCT, but they will be able to tell if the displays and furniture look worn and outdated. To remain relevant, because a brick-and-mortar optical is competing with e-commerce, practices need to create inventive ways to entertain and provide a pleasing environment.



Example of displays & design by industry specialist the Eye Designs Group.

Which brings me back to "brand theater." It's part of your design, but do you have the right ticket?

HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Use large graphics that target your patients, gets their attention and connects with them to create loyalty.
- Integrating video in select areas can be an effective way to inform your patients. Typically one large video monitor is most effective as multiple videos create unnecessary noise. Walk into any high-end designer boutique and you will see one large video highlighting recent fashion shows and introducing new products and styles.
- Consider using music, and if you already have music, make certain it appeals to your patient base. Music can trigger emotional responses when used thoughtfully. This includes your telephone on-hold message.
- Focus on demographics and merchandise to your patients accordingly. Your practice will perform better with improved product turnover ratios compared to having excess inventory of dated products.
- Engage your patients across multiple touch points (signage, graphics, video, music, point-of-sale) and don't forget the contact lens area.
- Doctors have learned that for their patients the shopping experience is not just about providing prescriptions, it's about creating a shopping experience that is fun, exciting and establishes a true brand connection to you as well as the products you sell.

Brand theater, as in regular theater, has a stage, lighting, materials, finishes and props. It conveys a message through multiple dimensions, as should the presentation of your products and services. What is your practice doing to enhance the optical experience using brand theater? Will your patients have, and continue to have, an experience they can't wait to share (think social media)? If so, that's the right ticket!

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