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THE AUTOMATION REVOLUTION

**How recent advances in robotics
have influenced workflow**

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FEATURES

ZERO TO HERO: STAFF TRAINING

ONLINE MARKETING

SATISLOH SLUGFEST

EDITOR'S LETTER



I'd love to say (or write), "Spring is in the air." However, as I type this missive, it is a cold, gray and wet day in New York.

In other words: Typical winter weather for these parts.

As seasons go, of course, spring probably has the most metaphoric power. It is the season of "renewal," obviously, and, for farmers (not that I know much about them, being a city person), it marks the planting of new crops. Most of us, city- and country-folk alike, generally carve out a little time for "spring cleaning."

What does spring mean for labs? Well, there is no hard and fast rule. However, the articles on the following pages feature labs discussing the adoption of the latest robotics technologies ("The Automation Revolution"), a how-to on

training new lab staff and a brief guide to marketing your lab by building an online "community."

What does all that have to do with spring? On the surface (lab pun intended), not much. However, going back to the concept of renewal and planting of new seeds, there may be something there. In other words, is spring the time to re-think lab operations and business management?

That may be a year-round thing. But either way, we hope this issue of LABTALK will help you prepare for what your future holds in store—this spring, and beyond.

Thanks for reading, and enjoy the issue,

—Brian P. Dunleavy

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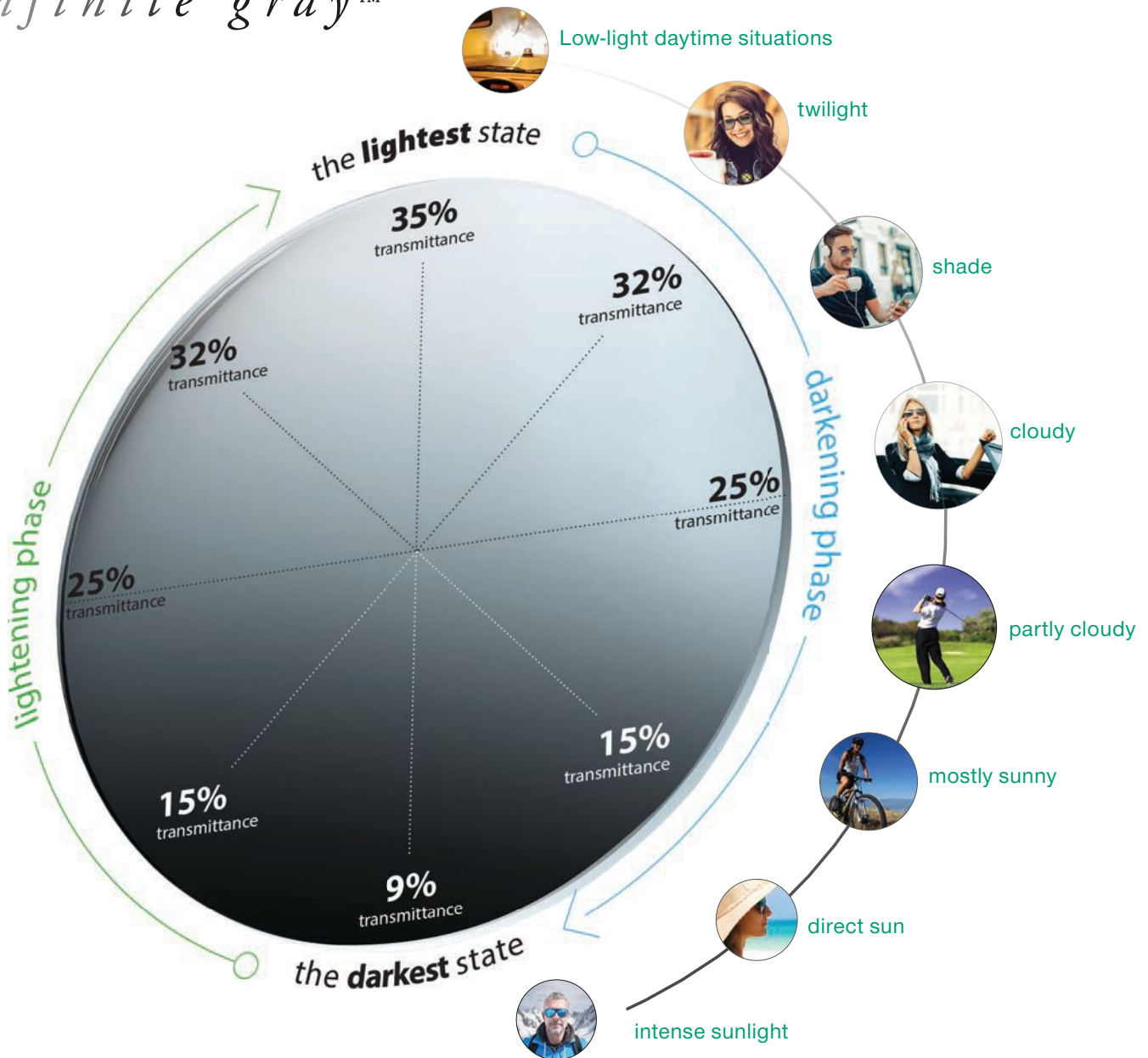
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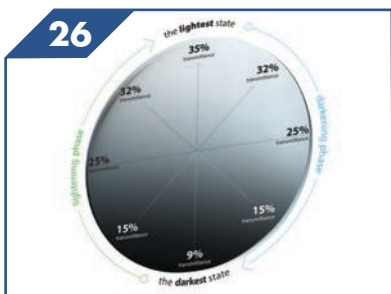
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- **HOW TO LEAD IN LENS EDUCATION**
- **A GUIDE TO NEW LENSES AND COATINGS**
- **IDENTIFYING NEW METRICS FOR LENS PROCESSING AND AR COATING EFFICIENCY**
- **SPOTLIGHT ON... VEE/LAB DIVISION, TRANSITIONS ACADEMY, COLA SPRING MEETING**

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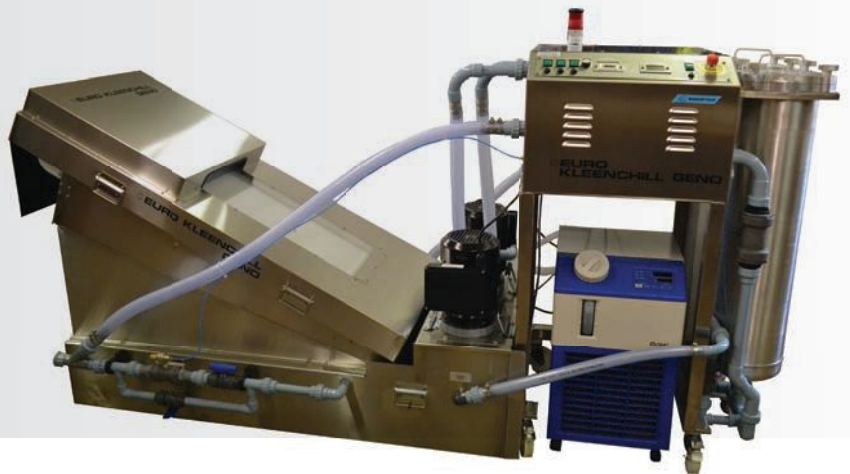
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THE AUTOMATION REVOLUTION

HOW RECENT ADVANCES IN ROBOTICS HAVE INFLUENCED WORKFLOW

By **KAREN APPOLD**

You've heard vendors say it over and over—automating your lab will improve workflow and performance and increase efficiency.

But is it true? And what about smaller labs? Can they benefit from automation also?

We checked in with some labs that have incorporated various forms of automation into the production process to get the real answer. Here's what they had to say.

Workflow and Efficiency

When asked to explain the benefits of automation to his lab, Adam Cherry, president and owner, Cherry Optical, Inc., Green Bay, Wis., doesn't hesitate.

"Whenever I add a new piece of automation, I instantly see the advantages," he says. "Automation allows for a

constant flow of operations. We have systematically built in automation to allow us to grow."

"We manufacture a wide variety of lens types and styles, which adds to the lab's complexity," adds Jon Nordman, director of operations, Walman Optical—Optical Service Center, Brooklyn Park, Minn. "Automation allows us to consistently mass produce a customized product."

Cherry Optical produces 850 jobs per day, and the lab recently underwent a major overhaul that essentially automated roughly 85 percent of its processing facility. Part of that project involved installing automated de-stackers and stackers into the production line.

"Automated de-stackers or stackers... are more compact and allow us to queue up jobs in front of different automated machines," Cherry explains. In addition, they save floor space and free up operators to work on value-

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added tasks. Cherry emphasizes, however, that a lab employee still needs to load and unload jobs.

Walman Optical, which manufactures more than 5,000 jobs per day, says its manufacturing execution system allows the company to monitor machine usage rates and errors in real time, which decreases equipment downtime. The lab's automated inspection equipment also provides complete mapping of lenses.

"We monitor spoilage rates closely and constantly make adjustments to keep spoilage low," says Gerid Villella, digital/office supervisor, Walman Optical—Optical Service Center.

"This enables us to track production issues back to a specific machine that is responsible for an error," adds Sherri Henkemeyer, quality control and continuous improvement manager, Walman Optical—Optical Service Center. "This helps us to quickly correct issues with the production process."

Overall, at minimum, Cherry estimates that most automated equipment increases production speed by 25 percent.

"The longer span of time that an automated piece of equipment runs, the more efficient it becomes over what an individual can do," he explains. For instance, even though a laboratory optician can manually surface-block up to 60 jobs in an hour—the same amount as Schneider's automated CCU Modulo system, for the sake of comparison—employees need to take breaks for various reasons, while the automated machine works non-stop.

"With a fully automated surface taper, our inventory team can keep working on picking lenses, unpacking lenses, prioritizing orders, and getting orders into production while the machine continually tapes lenses," Cherry says of his Optotech's OTT 80 CNC-A. "This eliminates the need for someone to do the repetitive task of handling lenses and pressing a button. The gain in efficiency of this simple step is outstanding."

HOW THEY'VE AUTOMATED

Here's a list of the automated machines the labs interviewed for this story have installed:

CHERRY OPTICAL

- Optotech OTT 80 CNC-A—auto surface taper
- Schneider CCU Modulo—surface blocker
- Schneider HSC Smart A, Smart XP, Modulo XT—digital generators
- Schneider CCL Modulo—laser engraver
- Schneider DBA—automated surface de-blocker
- Schneider TSA—automated surface de-taper
- FISA CS20 – automated ultrasonic lens cleaner
- Ultra Optics 44R—automated backside UV hard-coating
- A&R MBV—automated Rx verification & finish blocking
- MEI 641-A—automated milling/edging
- Essilor SBSM—automated backside thermal hard-coating
- 8 stacker/de-stackers—tray handling

WALMAN OPTICAL—OPTICAL SERVICE CENTER

- 2 Opto-tech Autoblockers
- 13 digital generators—Satisloh Orbit 2, Satisloh Orbit 1, Schneider Masters
- 10 automated polishers—Schneider CCP-103, Satisloh DuoFlex, Satisloh MultiFlex
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Reduced Overhead

Because Cherry Optical continues to grow, it hasn't eliminated staff positions, even while incorporating automated equipment. But it hasn't had to increase its staff size, either. "That is the biggest advantage of automation," Cherry says. "With the right automation, you might be able to complete twice the number of jobs with the same number of employees. Without automation we would need to employ about thirty percent more people, which would be very expensive."

Many of the manual jobs Cherry replaced with automation were simple repetitive tasks. "After automating an employee's manual position, we use that person's skills elsewhere or train them for a more highly skilled position," Cherry says. These could range from processing techniques that still need to be done by hand, machine maintenance, analyzing job data, troubleshooting errors, programming or operating machines, or cross training to work within different departments.

Consequently, instead of paying staff members \$8 to \$10 per hour, more highly skilled employees command \$15 to \$18 per hour. Cherry finds that this a win-win for both the employee and company. "There's a different mentality between an \$8 and an \$18 per hour employee," he says. "Skilled employees are more dependable, more loyal to the company, and have less turnover. They look at what they do as a profession and a career, not just a job. And when they have that mentality, they take more pride in what they do, which is reflected in the product that they make."

Walman Optical hasn't reduced headcount either as a result of adding automation. "But we have increased the plant's capacity to coincide with growth without adding any additional employees," Henkemeyer says. "We have been able to redirect existing labor to other needed areas as our daily job count increases. Less advanced training is needed with automation because machine programming controls variables and standardized work instructions define consistent process steps."

And, contrary to popular belief, automation does not mean "more expensive." In his experience, Cherry has found that the cost is about the same for manual and automated equipment when considering purchase and maintenance costs.

"Although automated equipment is more expensive than manually loaded equipment, you'll get approximately twenty-five percent more capacity and efficiency out of it," he says. "So even though automated equipment will cost more upfront, it starts to save you substantial amounts of money from the onset."

In addition, you'll need fewer pieces of automated equipment than manual machines. Cherry estimates that for every four pieces of automated equipment, you might need five or six pieces of manual equipment to achieve the same amount of work. "The upfront costs are marginal compared to the long-term cost savings," he says.

Indeed, Nordman says automation has decreased Walman Optical's cost per lens significantly. "Overall our automated systems have allowed us better control over spoilage, higher productivity, and real time control over equipment and processes," he says.

“ Although automated equipment is more expensive than manually loaded equipment, you'll get approximately twenty-five percent more capacity and efficiency out of it. So even though automated equipment will cost more upfront, it starts to save you substantial amounts of money from the onset. ”

Smaller Labs

And what about smaller labs? Are there benefits to automating these facilities? Brian Goldstone, president, Express Lens Lab, Inc., Fountain Valley, Calif., says "yes." Express Lens Lab, Inc., has installed semi-automated equipment in its surface and edging departments. However, the lab has not implemented robotic loading.

"As long as the automation is well calibrated and working well, it can improve workflow and accuracy and allows labs with a small number of staff members to repurpose employees in areas where automation is not available or possible," he explains. "However, the cost of robotic loading is too expensive and does not justify the savings. But as demand for robotic loading increases, and the technology improves, the costs will decrease making it more affordable and justifiable for independent wholesale labs."

Goldstone believes that smaller, independent labs should consider automation and/or robotics to the extent that their budgets allow. "Proceed with caution, given the changing climate of lab orders resulting from more third-party insurance companies processing their own lab orders," he notes. "That takes opportunities away from independent labs and limits their growth potential."

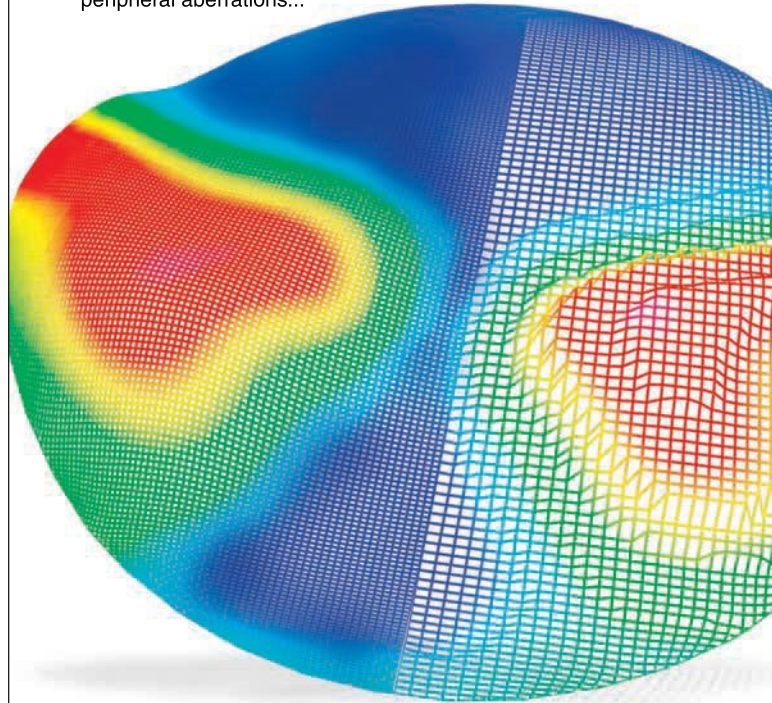
When considering automation, Goldstone believes that a lab should base its decision on product mix rather than the number of jobs per day that it produces. "A lower-volume lab that consistently produces a higher mix of challenging materials and costly designs would have a greater need for automated equipment compared to a high-volume lab that primarily produces simple, budget-orientated orders," he explains. ■

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Zero to Hero

Enhancing approaches to staff training in a high-tech environment

By **ROBERT MINARDI**

We've all had to start new jobs. When we were young, it was simple. You want to make some money? Start knocking on doors, ask people if they want their grass cut, "borrow" your Dad's mower and start pushing. If you're an unfortunate soul like me and lived in an area with bitter cold winters, you'll also know all about hustling \$5 to shovel driveways. These jobs are self-explanatory and don't require a lot of training.

It's a different story with tasks you'll likely find in an optical lab. For example, surface blocking, or inserting lenses into ophthalmic frames. These are detailed operations that need to be done a certain way. Excellent training is essential in keeping your breakage low and your production high.

I want to introduce you to the training system I've used for decades. It's simple, easy to learn and will get your trainees properly prepared, lightning fast.

First though, we need to lay some ground rules: There are two bare minimum requirements your lab needs for an effective training strategy—a solid initial training presentation and Standard Operating Procedures.

Start Strong

While it's tempting to get people out on the floor immediately, it's better to educate them first. When new employees arrive, give them a tour of the facility and a high level overview of the steps involved in making a

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pair of glasses. Next, take them through a PowerPoint presentation showing the types of lenses and frames they'll be working with.

Each topic in your presentation should have at least one example or demonstration. When your trainees handle, manipulate and discuss the things they'll be working with, it makes the learning process so much quicker and easier. This also teaches them the nomenclature for our industry right away, allowing for clear communication of questions and concerns. You'll get less of "the thingy isn't reading right," and more of "the bifocal add is off-power."

The most important thing you can do during this initial training session, is keep it casual. Joke around, smile and have fun. You want new employees to be as comfortable as possible when the job-specific training begins. Refrain from saying things like, "You have so much to learn," or, "You've got a long way to go." These statements don't help anyone.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

Getting people trained quickly and accurately requires a clear set of instructions and goals. Well written, cleanly structured and easily available SOPs are crucial. If trainees know exactly what needs to be done, they're less likely to over-handle or over-process the work, thereby improving production and reducing the likelihood of breakage. For those not familiar with SOPs, they're basically a recipe for how a job is to be performed.

A very basic SOP for surface blocking might look like this:

Purpose: Verification and Blocking of Surface Lenses

1. Get a job tray.
2. Make sure the tray number on the paperwork matches the actual tray number.
3. Set the tray next to the blocker with the lenses facing toward you.
4. Scan the job into the blocker using the barcode scanner.
5. Make sure the correct job is loaded on the blocker screen.

This example is okay, but an SOP is much better with

images. Everyone has a camera on their phone these days, so there's no excuse for not having pictures of crucial steps. Think to yourself, "How can I make these instructions so good, the correct way of doing this job is obvious?" Also, use plain English in your SOPs and stray away from words like "obtain", "utilize" or "assess." English may not be your new hires first language, so keep it simple.

SOPs for all production positions in the lab should follow the same format and structure, whatever that may be. There are literally hundreds of templates on the internet for you to "utilize."

Even the best SOP is useless unless it's readily available. You don't want them tucked away in a computer folder called "Miscellaneous." At a minimum, they should be stored in a clearly labeled folder, on a very accessible computer, in a location everyone knows, broken down into sub-categories, with very descriptive names. If you really want to do it right, set up an internal network with all your SOPs loaded and structured like a website. It's intuitive, clean and available.

I Go, You Go

What I'm about to share with you is the most effective training system the world has ever seen. Okay, I might be exaggerating a bit, but I've personally used this technique to train an entire shift worth of new hires, without a single percent increase in breakage.

When you're training someone, the worst thing you can do is hover over their shoulder and hope they remember the correct steps in the right sequence. It's a breakage prone, slow style of training that, unfortunately, is all too common.

A better way, is to start by doing the job yourself while they watch. Then they'll do a job while you watch. Again, you do a job, then they'll do a job. I go, you go.

Regardless of whose turn it is to perform the task, you will be saying the steps out loud at first.

Example:

Step 1: "Get a job tray from the stack"

Step 2: "Make sure the tray number on the paperwork matches the actual tray number, because if it doesn't match, the machine won't cut the lens correctly."

Step 3: "Set the tray next to the blocker with the lenses facing toward you because that's how the lenses go on the blocker."

This does a couple things. First, trainees don't have to remember anything, because you're telling them how to do it and why. This immediately reduces their anxiety and allows them to get comfortable with the task. Second, when it's your turn to do the job, they can watch the subtleties in your technique. Things like how you rest your hand on the machine or how you fold the paperwork. If they don't see how these things are done, they'll have to make it up for themselves as they go along, which is far from ideal.

After you've done five or so rotations, and the new employees seem like they're getting the hang of it, have them say the steps out loud. Every now and then ask them, "And why are you doing that?" Their response should be the same reason you explained to them earlier. The correct one.

You're ingraining perfect technique into their brains by repetition, mimicking and the mantra of the steps said out loud.

Also, it helps if you separate out simpler jobs with fewer steps and work on those first. Once they have those down, add a little complexity. From our surface blocking example, you'd start with single-vision, work your way into segmented multifocals, then to executives.

If you're training someone on a job with many steps, like machine calibration, break down the steps into logical chunks and only have them perform part of the job until they get the hang of that. Then add a little more, until they're doing the entire calibration.

If you need help with a basic training presentation, lens/frame demos, or clarification on anything in this article, feel free to contact me through my website: <https://robertminardi.com>. ■

Robert Minardi, ABO-AC, has been in manufacturing for almost 25 years. He's a certified Lean Six Sigma Black Belt with a background in quality control.

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Schmoozing Online

How to use online communities for marketing and recruiting

By **JOE DYSART**

With the phenomenal success of social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube, optical lab leaders are creating their own online communities, where they can promote their brand, glean valuable feedback from customers, and find future staff amidst the online message posts.

Says Paul Gillin, author of *The New Influencers: A Marketer's Guide to the New Social Media*: "Blogs, discussion boards and other forms of interactive media are the most cost-effective customer feedback mechanism ever invented. You won't get a representative sampling of your customers, but you will get your most passionate customers."

So how do you build your own sense of community online—with an eye toward building the customer relationships for your lab?

Model Communities

Without question, in the optical industry, the pre-eminent online community is Optiboard (www.optiboard.com). Optiboard brings together eyecare professionals from every facet of the industry—optical labs, doctors, retailers and more.

Driven by numerous online discussion boards featuring posts from across the industry—and across the world—Optiboard currently has more than 28,000 members, an archive of more than 500,000 posts and a history that dates back to 1995.

"Part luck and timing, part hard work and education, part finding the right audience," explained Steve Machol, OptiBoard's president and founder, in describing the community's origins and rapid growth. "I had been in the optical industry for 22

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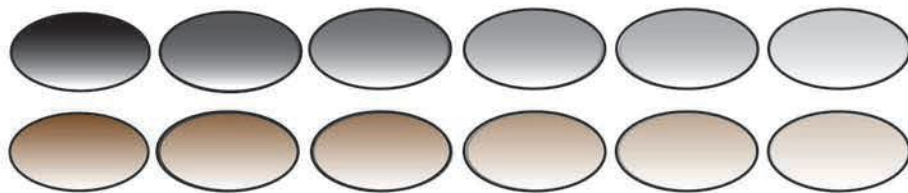
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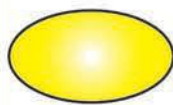
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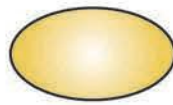
Useful in bright light situations, BPI® Blue Filter Vision 540™.



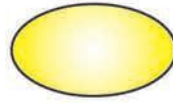
Red / Green color blindness. BPI® Deep Red Monochrome 600™ has long been used to allow those afflicted with red/green color blindness.



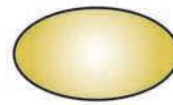
Macular Degeneration. BPI® Total Day™ is a tan colored tint that provides blue violet attenuation with minimal color distortion.



Night driving. BPI® Total Night™, a light saturated yellow tint, is especially useful in blocking the blue/violet light.



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years by that point. So I combined my knowledge of optics with my love of computers.”

While Optiboard has always been an independent community populated by pros throughout the industry, a number of businesses do get recognition on Optiboard by helping to sponsor it. It’s also a great study for any optical business that is looking to create it online community—given the fact that Optiboard has been able to generate and sustain its digital neighborhood for more than 20 years.

One key, Machol said, was the strategy to avoid needless controversy. “One thing I’ve always tried to do is ensure that OptiBoard is a welcoming place for everyone,” he noted. “This means avoiding topics that only serve to alienate and divide us. That’s why I have prohibited the talk of politics on the board. There are already plenty of places where people can engage in that kind of discourse, but I saw no benefit to the OptiBoard community.”

David Rips, CEO, Younger Optics, is one of the online community’s believers: “Optiboard was out there before social media, and for a long time, it was the only way for optical professionals to connect with a large number of peers outside their local area,” he said. “People may think that social media is replacing forums, but Optiboard is still the only place where people can have work-related discussions with a group that is exclusively optical pros.”

Adds Chris Ryser, owner, OMS Optochemicals: “OptiBoard has the highest Alexa ranking and still is the most popular forum of the still existing 13 professional optical forums worldwide.”

Other optical industry related online communities to check out include:

- **Ask the Lab Guy:**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/askthelabguy>
- **Eyewear to Eyewear Dealer:**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/eyewear.dealer2dealer>
- **Optical Lab Technicians:**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/335873626475657/about>

- **Wholesale Optical Lab Managers and Opticians Plus:**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/209415609268689>

Selecting a Community Type

Before launching your own online community, it’s critical to decide which of three primary community categories you’ll pursue.

Most popular are simple social hang-outs, which attempt to attract as many members as possible by replicating the communities on Facebook and offering as many community features as possible.

Meanwhile, other online communities are solely dedicated to market research, and often opt for an invitation-only model. Such communities generally result in smaller memberships that are by design more intimate. Users—generally highly valued customers who offer dependable insights—usually post more often and more regularly than those in purely social networks. Sometimes, specific discussion threads on company products and services in the online communities last for years.

The third genre of online community is designed for one purpose only: to gather customer reviews or testimonials on company products and/or services, and to publicize that feedback to prospective customers. The first and third types, of course, place no restriction on who can visit and participate in the online community.

Not surprisingly, so-called social hang-outs or “everyone’s invited” sites often have more community-building features than the smaller sites, and sometimes even have the overall look and feel of a Facebook or LinkedIn site. If you’re interested in starting this type of online community, you’ll want to offer slickly designed tools like discussion boards, chatrooms, instant messaging, blogging, photo posting and similar services offered by the global social networks.

Experienced company community builders also say you should jump-start the community’s

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nerve center—the discussion board—by posting commentary on a dozen or so industry topics, and then encouraging visitors to offer their own reactions and opinions to the discussions you’ve started.

With just a little luck and perseverance, these discussion boards will take on a life of their own, with community visitors coming up with their own follow-up topics, and others volunteering to moderate special interest groups they are passionate about. Some members will even volunteer to guard your forums for the occasional visitor who shows up to make mischief.

Such discussion forums, Machol said, are the lifeblood of OptiBoard. “I’m very proud of the fact that OptiBoard is full of smart, dedicated eyecare professionals who love to help each other out,” he noted. “As an old lab guy myself, I greatly appreciate the interaction and helpfulness of the members. OptiBoard serves as an information hub—our knowledgeable members provide every-day, on-the-ground technical information.”

“ Before launching your own online community, it’s critical to decide which of three primary community categories you’ll pursue. ”

After your discussion forums have been up-and-running for awhile, you may want to bring in professional moderators—experts in fields like law, accounting and technology—who assume responsibility for moderating and managing their own forums.

These “expert” forums are a win-win for both parties. You, as the sponsoring company, yield the prestige of having industry recognized authorities contributing to your Web site on a regular basis. And the experts get valuable exposure to an audience of potential customers. Within these ongoing conversations or “discussion threads,” you’ll also begin to glean valuable insights on how customers

truly view your document imaging company, and freely sharing what’s working, and what’s not.

Not surprisingly, some companies also use discussion forums as an incubator for prospective employees, and sometimes offer staff positions to qualified discussion board posters who are enthusiastic about their company.

In many cases, you’ll be able to learn a great deal about a potential employee simply by observing what he or she is posting, and how he or she is reacting to what is being posted. If you’re looking to create one of these “everyone’s invited” online communities, you can reach out to service providers that make template communities you can bolt-onto your Web site or other Web property. Examples include:

- **Elliptics:** <http://elliptics.com/>
- **eXo Platform:** <https://www.exoplatform.com>
- **BuddyPress:** <https://buddypress.org>

Meanwhile, the second flavor of online industry communities, small, private, invitation only affairs, are often used by companies to conduct market research they’re looking to keep quiet. Fostering these kinds of communities is the specialty of online service provider C-space (<https://www.cspace.com>).

“When a few hundred members are participating on a regular basis, the quantity and quality of the content is deeper and richer than from large public sites,” said Katrina Lerman, associate director at C-Space. “For companies that truly want to connect with their customers, smaller may in fact be better.”

Under the C-Space model, private customer communities are generally housed on a password-protected site, where an intimate group of members spends months—and sometimes even years—together, brainstorming ideas for a company, sharing conversations with other company customers, and essentially playing a pivotal role shaping the company’s future.

“Several facilitators guide the conversation and help

bridge the gap between customer and company,” Lerman explained, adding that the intimacy and invitation-only factor also tends to result in greater numbers of members participating in the ongoing discussions. “When members contribute, they participate at a high rate.”

Finally, the third type of online community—sites dedicated to netting customer reviews and testimonials—appear to be cropping up in virtually every industry that regularly interfaces with consumers. One of the leading service providers in this space is Bazaarvoice (<http://www.bazaarvoice.com>), a review community builder that urges companies to be transparent by publishing both negative and positive reviews filed by customers.

“Marketers increasingly understand the importance of product reviews in driving consumer adoption and purchase conversion in the channel,” noted Loran Gutt, vice president, product strategy at Bazaarvoice.

If you’re a bit skittish about Bazaarvoice’s belief in publishing the good with the bad when it comes to reviews, you may be more interested in a solution offered by Zuberance (<http://www.zuberance.com>). Essentially, Zuberance uses a glowing, testimonials-only approach to community building, through which extremely enthusiastic customers offer accolade-filled write-ups on your business. The company solicits the testimonials with contact tools it places on your web site, as well as via marketing emails it sends to your customers on your behalf. Customers who decide to respond are directed to a post-your-own-testimonial module, which includes tips on how to write a humdinger of a fan letter about your company.

“It’s a good time to become a niche online community and do it right,” said Don Philabaum, CEO of Internet Strategies Group (<http://www.internetstrategiesgroup.com>). “You have millions of people who have learned the value of being a part of an online community, and they’ll bring experience, enthusiasm, content, and their network, to your online community.” ■

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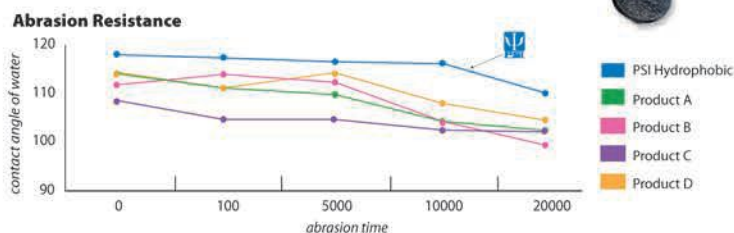


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TECHTALK

After talking with lab owners and managers, we found that they want even **MORE** technical information than before, not less. So *LabTalk* is giving you, *TechTalk*, technical information that labs can use.

FOR THIS INSTALLMENT OF TECHTALK, WE ASKED INDUSTRY LEADERS TO RESPOND TO TWO QUESTIONS. FOR THE FIRST, WE ASKED: WHAT IS THE 'NEXT FRONTIER' FOR AUTOMATION TECHNOLOGY? FOR THE SECOND, WE ASKED: WHAT WOULD BE A GOOD "TECH-FOCUSED" NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION FOR WHOLESALE OPTICAL LABS? HERE ARE THEIR RESPONSES:

WHAT IS THE 'NEXT FRONTIER' FOR AUTOMATION TECHNOLOGY?



ROBERT SHANBAUM
President,
Ocuco USA

Automation isn't just conveyors and loaders. It can also consist of efficient manufacturing and materials handling methods, powered by software systems that take work, and thereby cost, out of the process.

At Ocuco, we've created features in our Innovations ULS lab management software that make the process of expediting work through the laboratory less labor-intensive. This is becoming ever more important as two factors continue to impact our industry, the first being the practice of outsourcing work to Asian labs so as to exploit the cost advantages available there. That outsourcing, often across multiple suppliers, has to be managed efficiently, as does the handling of orders as they are received from the suppliers.

The second, somewhat related factor is the consolidation that has occurred, and continues to occur, here and abroad; there's an increasing need to route orders across a network of labs, elevating the efficiency of the network. In both cases, we've had to focus on the efficient handling of orders, in addition to our traditional roles of pricing, invoicing, calculating, communicating, monitoring and tracking. Meanwhile, within individual labs, the more traditional forms of automation—conveyors and loaders—are becoming ubiquitous, domestically, in an effort to compete with the lower overseas labor costs, and internationally, as costs there gradually rise.

As more labs "conveyorize," they run into problems associated with the serialization of orders, which our software can help to solve.

WHAT IS A GOOD “TECH-FOCUSED” NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION FOR WHOLESALE OPTICAL LABS?



BOB GASCOYNE
General Manager
Europtica

With production processes becoming faster and increasingly more automated, labs are investing even more in the latest technologies, with an emphasis on productivity and quality.

One area often overlooked is fluid and waste management, a critical factor in the quality of the finished lens. Too often, waste management is something that simply gets treated as a bolt-on when purchasing new generators and polishers. However, it pays to look to the world-class technology leader in this area: Europtica International.

Many labs will not have the financial resources and space to make a large capital investment in a central waste management system. If your lab runs several generators that require fluid and waste management systems, talk to the experts about a solution that provides improved productivity and quality without a large capital expenditure. Polish management, for either hard- or soft-tool polishing, is also crucial within the process. The correct control of filtration, temperature and flow rate is key to consistent quality.

Make it your New Year’s resolution to contact waste management experts, review these processes in your lab and identify where you can improve productivity and quality.



KEVIN CROSS
Vice President Sales,
North America,
Schneider Optical
Machines Inc.

Ahh, a New Year is upon us and it’s time for a fresh start. That being said, I always like to answer the question as to what is a great New Year’s Resolution for labs by asking, How about giving your machines a fresh start to the year?

Now is the time to review and resolve to perform your recommended and scheduled machine maintenances. So often the time starts to get away from us and we are completely involved with other things like taxes, business building efforts and whatever else is thrown on our plates. But isn’t machine maintenance as important as those others? Can’t build a business if your machines are always struggling, now can you? Can’t pay taxes if your machines are down and not making lenses, right?

So, I recommend that you resolve to conduct a factory check-up on your machines and schedule an annual factory maintenance so that your machines are ready for what the New Year can and will throw at you.

We schedule lots of annual check-ups for things like our physical health, our teeth and our eyes, so why not add in your machines and make sure they’re healthy as well? This also helps to avoid large repair bills later in the year by taking care of lots of little things before they become major problems. When you get a factory tune up and report card you can rest assured that your machines will be ready when you need them to be!

SPOTLIGHT ON...



Satisloh SLUGfest attendees toured the “Lab of the Future” on the Dallas campus of Essilor of America.

SATISLOH SLUGFEST

By **ANDREW KARP**

DALLAS—Satisloh asserted its position as a leading supplier of ophthalmic lens processing technology by unveiling a highly automated prescription lab during its ninth “SLUGfest” event here in November. The lab, located here on the corporate campus of parent company Essilor of America, features 34 new technologies.

SLUGfest is a technical conference hosted by the company; its name is derived from the acronym for Satisloh Users Group. The conference, held from November 10-13, 2017, drew 200 lab executives from more than 20 countries. They represented a wide range

of prescription labs, from single-location operations to large lab networks with multiple facilities.

Attendees toured the new lab, where they witnessed equipment demonstrations by Satisloh technical experts and participated in seminars. Also on hand were representatives from several vendors including MEI Systems and A&R Optical Machinery, whose equipment is integrated into the lab.

The design of the new lab, which Satisloh named “Lab 4.0: the Lab of the Future,” is based on a continuous improvement program called Lab 4.0 that is intended to streamline Rx lens production and make the

manufacturing process much more efficient.

“Our goal was to get rid of batches and piles of trays, to make it look not busy,” said Larry Clarke, CEO of Satisloh. Clarke added that the lab has the capacity to produce 2,500 Rx jobs per day with only 10 full time employees working two shifts a day.

Lab 4.0 involves several elements: a new generation of equipment consisting of smart machines with remote monitoring and diagnostics; a comprehensive support program including preventative maintenance; intelligent automation, which uses paperless job tracking and a GPS real-time location system and an Intelligent Smart Conveyor with fast tracking and collaborative robots. All components of the lab’s production process are interconnected using two approaches: MES-360 (Manufacturing Execution System) that uses real-time machine monitoring, conveyor routing, real-time breakage monitoring and coating batch tracking, and MOM-360, (Manufacturing Operations Management), which offers proactive scheduling, proactive quality control with statistical process

control, a quality control system with automated optical inspection and manual cosmetic inspection stations and front curve measurement and recalculation.

Labs that implement these four elements can achieve up to 30 percent faster production throughput, gain up to 25 percent in efficiency, use far less labor and become more environmentally friendly, according to Satisloh executives. Many attendees said they were impressed by the new technologies and Satisloh’s overall approach to lens making.

“I like the overall direction in presenting this as an IoT (Internet of Things) platform, which I think is where we need to head as an industry,” said SLUGfest attendee Robert Niemiec, senior vice president, engineering and technology, HVHC, Inc. “As we all come from different places in terms of having different kinds of equipment and different levels of technology, one challenge is going to be to sort out which of these technologies make the most sense and develop a plan as to how to best incorporate them.” ■



Satisloh's Brian Peterson demonstrates the company's new coating system featuring in-chamber monitoring of the coating process.

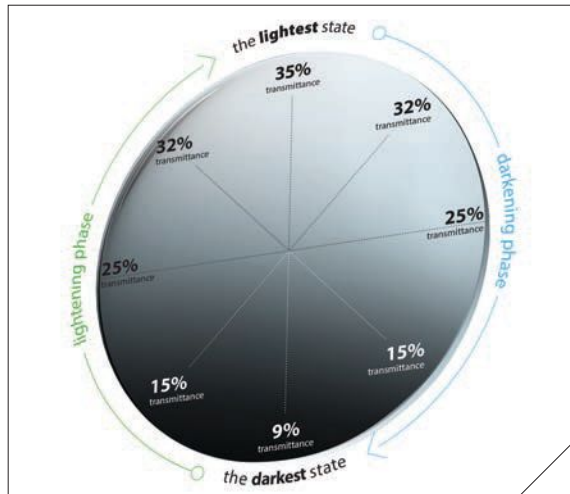
Younger Optics Launches NuPolar Infinite Gray Lenses

“The number one complaint I hear about polarized lenses,” says David Rips, president and CEO of Younger Optics, at a recent sales meeting, “is that they’re too dark. The second most common is that they’re too light!”

His audience of Younger Optics sales reps chuckles with recognition. “Younger Optics is now introducing a polarized sunwear lens that is very light gray when it needs to be, and very dark gray when the wearer needs it most,” Rips continued.

The new product is called NuPolar Infinite Gray, and it is now available in polycarbonate from optical laboratories. The darkness of the lens is controlled with a new UV-responsive photochromic technology that offers the widest range of light absorption of any polarized photochromic lens.

NuPolar Infinite Gray lenses are for patients who want a high-efficiency polarized Rx sunwear lens that can function seamlessly from shade to bright sunlight, and anything in between. From approximately 35% transmittance in low-UV surroundings to approximately 9% in very bright, reflective environments. Currently



available in gray, single-vision polycarbonate. Gray single-vision hard resin will be next.

To see a video about NuPolar Infinite Gray, visit facebook.com/youngeroptics. For more information about Younger Optics, visit the company’s web site at www.youngeroptics.com.

Universal Photonics Acquires J.I. Morris’s Polishing Discs and Cloths Business

Universal Photonics, Inc., a manufacturer and global distributor of critical surface preparation materials, has acquired Massachusetts-based J.I. Morris Company’s surface polishing pads and materials business.

J.I. Morris Company has more than 75 years of professional experience in developing materials to improve surface finishes, offering a broad range of high quality interfaces for industrial polishing discs, polishing pads and other custom applications. The business will operate in the JH Rhodes Company, Inc. manufacturing facility in Vernon, New York. JH Rhodes Company, Inc. is a subsidiary of Universal Photonics, Inc. and specializes in manufacturing polishing pads, typically for glass, crystal, metal and ceramic applications.

“UPI continues its mission to provide and advance critical surfacing materials with the acquisition of J.I. Morris Company’s polishing pad business,” said Neil Johnson, president and CEO of Universal Photonics. “J.I. Morris Company’s high quality products and services fits well into the polishing material business of Universal Photonics. The acquisition will expand our ability to meet specialized customer applications with an even larger variety of pad materials and technology.”

UPI offers a wide selection of polishing pads for processes from pre-polish to final-polish with surface requirements ranging from commercial grade to zero defect levels. Applications for UPI’s products include silicon wafers, ophthalmic lenses and quartz crystal. For information, visit: universalphotonics.com/.

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The outcome - accurate and repeatable generating results every time!

LABNOTES

Kloes to Lead Schneider's Technical Team

Schneider Optical Machines has appointed Florian Kloes as service manager for North America.

Kloes, who previously served in senior technical leadership and product management roles, has been with the company for 15 years. He began his tenure assembling the machines at the German factory and came to the U.S. as a key technical team member in 2008.

"Flo is one of the top technical experts in our industry and has proven his leadership skills with the U.S. team and our customer base for the last nine years. He will be an invaluable resource in this new leadership role dedicated to satisfying our customers' technical needs," said Trey Hoegenauer, director of operations for Schneider.

As service manager, Kloes will be responsible for leadership of the technical team as well as providing a key resource for all the service needs of the customer. In 2004, Kloes received his degree in mechatronics engineering from Heinrich Kleyer School in Frankfurt, Germany before joining Schneider.

Kurt Atchison, Schneider's president added, "Flo adds a key contact level to our growing team. He has been invaluable to virtually every Schneider customer for many years now and has proven his ability to lead a first-class team into the future. His unsurpassed technical skills combined with tremendous experience with what labs need to be successful promise to continue our great success and even reach new levels of excellence."

Kurt Gardner Joins FEA Industries Assumes role of VP of Sales

FEA Industries has named Kurt Gardner as Vice President of Sales, effective Feb. 1. Gardner recently served as Director of Business Development at IOT America.

"Kurt brings a wealth of knowledge of the industry, digital design and processing, and sales which will help us propel FEA to its full potential. We are excited to have him join us," said Bill Heffner, President and owner of FEA Industries. Heffner, who founded FEA more than 30 years ago, added, "Kurt has an unparalleled level of drive and passion for pushing the envelope in both technology and customer expectations. This approach will help drive FEA to the next level of service that our customers deserve."

Regarding the move, Gardner said, "I've known the folks at FEA for a while and a lot of what they do is really innovative. I'm excited to get involved in a business which can be a driver for independent ECPs to get away from commodity brand products and showcase their individual practice needs by offering unique solutions, not the same ones offered at the big box store down the street."

This move comes as FEA Industries shifts focus to better support the overall growth in independent practices and products across the entire industry. For more information, visit <http://www.feaind.com/>.





LAB 4.0 REQUIRES
A HIGHER LEVEL
OF PERFORMANCE.

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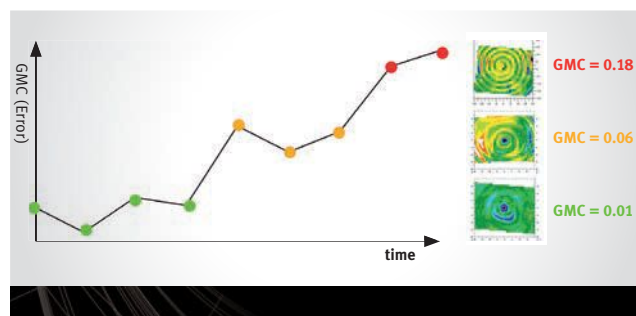
A&R ProMapper inspection equipment combines our most innovative technologies – in a compact design. All Rx labs now have a solution to everyday production challenges.

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- Meaningful, accurate data for Zero Defects process monitoring – the first step into Lab 4.0



Our innovation. Your performance.



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LABNOTES

Luxexcel Opens US Office

Luxexcel has opened its US headquarters in Alpharetta, GA in the greater Atlanta area. Guido Groet, Chief Commercial Officer of Luxexcel has relocated to Alpharetta to lead the operations of Luxexcel Inc. as an integral part of his global commercial responsibilities.

Hans Streng, Chief Executive Officer, Luxexcel said: "Luxexcel is pushing a new lens-manufacturing paradigm with great opportunities for innovators in the ophthalmic and consumer-electronics industries. Our market is taking off and we are expanding rapidly, with the first VisionPlatform solutions installed in the field. It is great to see our customers producing 3D-printed prescription lenses for ophthalmic and augmented-reality applications. It is a great next step for Luxexcel to open its US headquarters to ramp up our business activities."

Groet added: "We are building our US team in all front-end areas, sales/marketing, business development and service alike. Luxexcel has a tradition of hiring employees with the attitude of making the impossible, possible. We have installed our first VisionPlatforms in the US and follow-up ambitions are high. The US market is a market which is open for innovation and opportunity and this goes hand in hand with our mission to revolutionize the eyewear industry and offer smart eyewear to the world."

The Luxexcel VisionPlatform prints lenses for non-mainstream applications and continuously develops solutions to manufacture new and unique products. Luxexcel has now made the first step into smart eyewear together with Vuzix; other revolutionary products are in the pipeline. The Luxexcel technology combines hardware, consumables and design-software in one 3D printing solution called the Luxexcel VisionPlatform.

The company recently announced that it has installed the VisionPlatform in a second U.S.-based lab, Quest Vision Care Specialty Lab in Largo, Florida. Ophthalmic labs receive the complete platform, which includes a printer (VisionEngine), resins (VisionClear), support and software solutions (VisionMaster) in return for a click fee payment. Lenses produced with the VisionPlatform are ISO Focal Power compliant and compatible with today's industry coatings and customary processes like edging and framing. The Luxexcel VisionPlatform can be integrated into today's proven ophthalmic lab workflow.

For more information visit www.luxexcel.com.

Coburn Technologies Promotes Dayna Valente and Welcomes Megan Brennen

Coburn Technologies, Inc. is pleased to announce some changes in its organization. Dayna Valente has been promoted to Director of Finance and Megan Brennen has been hired as the new Director of Human Resources. Both positions report to directly to Alex Incera, President of Coburn Technologies.

"It brings me great pleasure to promote Dayna to the new Director of Finance position," said Incera. "She is a huge asset to our team, and plays a key role in supporting the company's financial needs as we plan our growth for the future."

Valente has been with Coburn since 2013 in various Accounting and Finance capacities. Most recently, she has been overseeing the purchasing and demand planning functions for Coburn.

The company also welcomes a new employee, Megan Brennen, as their new Director of Human Resources. "Megan is a great addition to Coburn," Incera noted. "She brings a broad array of experience, specifically in talent acquisition and recruiting, which will most definitely help our company continue expand."

Prior to Coburn, Brennen worked for Serendipity Labs in Rye, New York, where she headed up the Human Resources function.



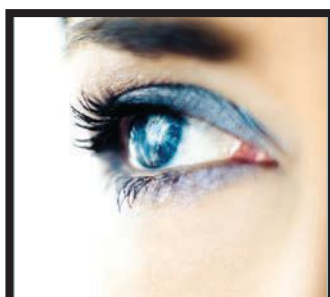
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LABNOTES

Signet Celebrates 25 Years of KODAK Lenses

2018 marks the 25th anniversary since the launch of the first KODAK Lens in the United States. Since then, Kodak-branded lens designs, lens materials, optical technologies and software have been helping millions of eyeglass wearers experience better vision all over the world.

Signet Armorlite, Inc. licensed the Kodak brand from Eastman Kodak Company in 1992 and launched KODAK Progressive Lens the following year. KODAK Concise® and KODAK Precise® Progressive Lenses followed in the early 2000s becoming popular lens designs in the industry. The first freeform progressive in the United States, KODAK Unique Progressive Lens, made its debut in 2006 and continues to deliver great vision throughout the world.

Today, the global KODAK Lens portfolio includes everyday single-vision, bifocal and progressive lens designs as well as specialized lenses for specific lifestyles. Among others, these products include computer lens designs, single vision lenses with added boost, and blue light filtering lens materials and coatings to relieve eye strain in our heavily digitalized modern world.

Following the Kodak legacy, KODAK Lens marketing was revamped in 2015 to focus on Signet Armorlite's goal to help consumers "See the Colors of Life." This initiative includes KODAK Lens Professional Services which provide eye care professionals with in-store branding to distinguish them from big box retail competition. The patient education module, KODAK Lens Corner, includes hands-on lens samples to explain the benefits of different designs, materials, and coatings and has proved highly successful in dispensaries across the U.S.

"KODAK Lens products offer eyeglass wearers a multitude of options to meet their individual vision correction needs regardless of age or lifestyle," said Edward P. DeRosa, Executive Vice President, Signet Armorlite. "Signet Armorlite is committed to continuing to offer premium optical products under the Kodak brand that help lens users see the colors of life in work and play."

For more information, visit www.KodakLens.com.



OPL Celebrates 40th Anniversary

Optical Prescription Lab, of Pelham, Alabama, recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. During a special event held at The Club in nearby Birmingham, lab staff, customers and business partners enjoyed dinner and dancing.

OPL Director of Operations Brian Conley and Sales Representative Charlie Hunter describe the lab's growth during its 40 years in business.



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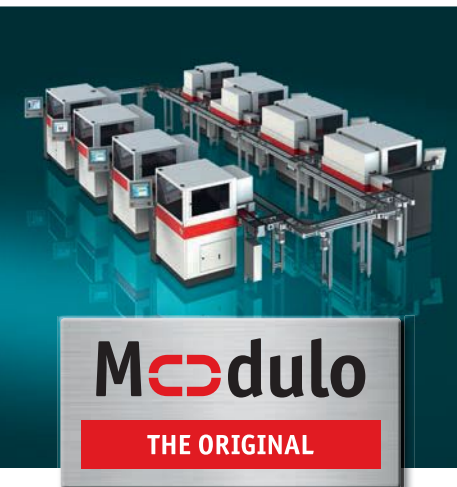


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