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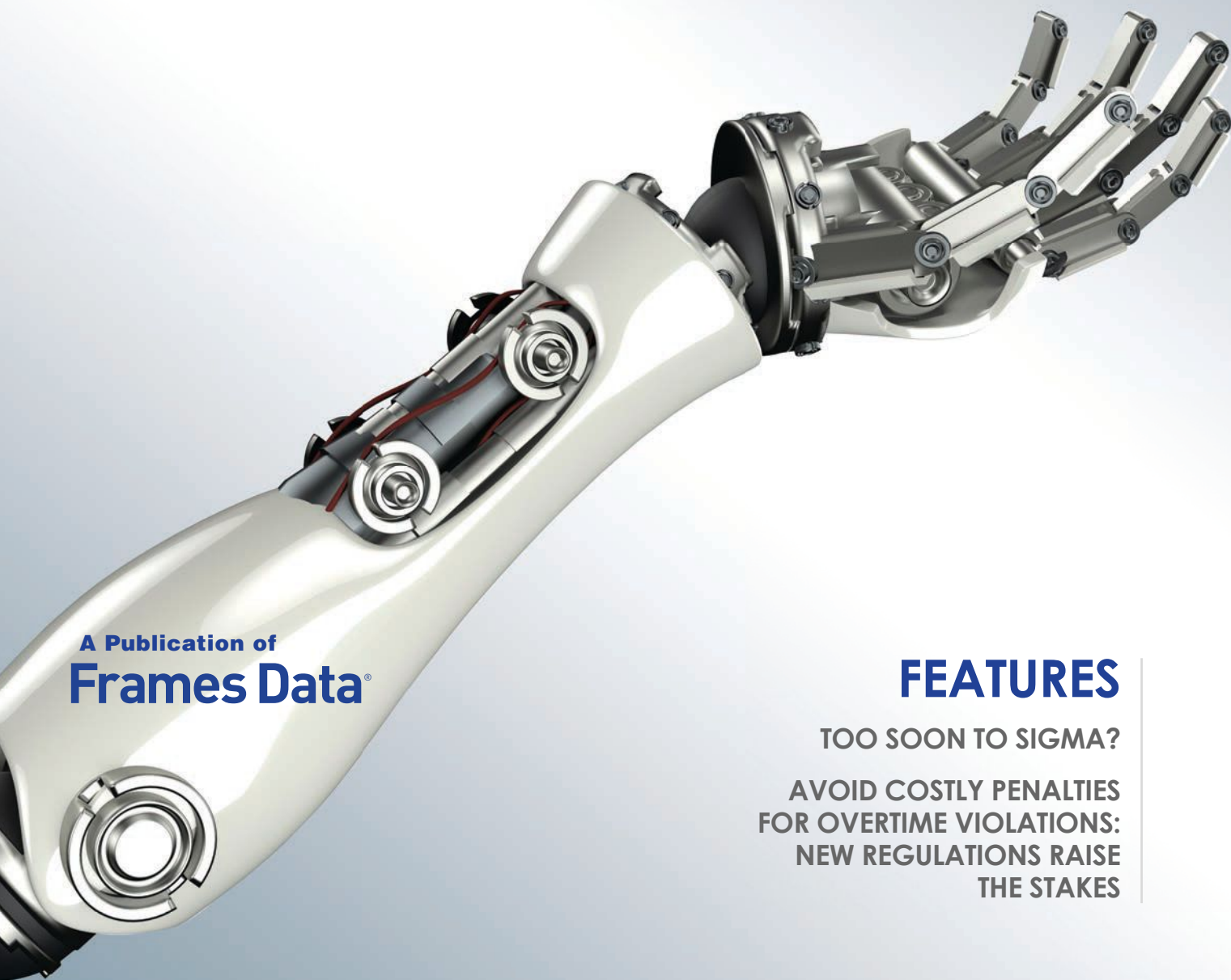
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THE CASE FOR AUTOMATION

FOUR AUTOMATED LABS SHARE THEIR MOTIVATIONS, INSIGHTS AND LESSONS LEARNED



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FEATURES

TOO SOON TO SIGMA?

AVOID COSTLY PENALTIES
FOR OVERTIME VIOLATIONS:
NEW REGULATIONS RAISE
THE STAKES

EDITOR'S LETTER



The start of a new year is a time for making plans, setting goals and/or making significant changes.

Can you tell I hate the phrase "New Year's Resolutions?"

There's a reason I hate it: because the New Year isn't—and shouldn't be—the only time to make "resolutions." Imagine: If your lab manager came to you in August with a great idea to improve efficiency, would you tell him or her, "We have to wait until January?" I doubt it.

When it comes to evaluating your business, there's no time like the present. In fact, management gurus far and wide will tell you that such self-evaluation is a continuous process.

And so, if you are thinking about automating certain functions in your production process, as the labs in our Cover Story in this issue—"The Case for Automation"—have done, there's no need to wait. Learn from the experiences of your peers, as described in the article. As another of our features in this issue ("Too Soon to Sigma?") reminds us, it is never the wrong time to innovate and improve.

I'm not saying scrap the annual rite of New Year's Resolutions. Heck, I make them, too. But they're only effective if we revisit and rework them, as needed, throughout the year.

Thank you for reading, and enjoy the issue.

—Brian P. Dunleavy

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The 40-hour work week laws and your lab



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- **THE LAB'S ROLE IN LENS EDUCATION**
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THE CASE FOR AUTOMATION

FOUR AUTOMATED LABS SHARE THEIR MOTIVATIONS, INSIGHTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

By **JULIE BOS**

When taking a lengthy or arduous journey, it's always nice to follow someone else's lead—to learn what went right, what went wrong, and how the path could have been smoother. This is certainly the case when making the decision to automate some or all of the production processes in your lab. With that in mind, we've collected success stories from four different optical labs who have made the move to automation and achieved excellent results.

Costco Optical Lab

Overview: The San Diego branch of Costco Optical Lab is one of two that supports the optical departments at all Costco Warehouses across the country. Within its 160,000-square-foot building—130,000 square feet is dedicated to production—this 24/7 facility has 750 employees and produces more than 50,000 pair of glasses per week, with 100 percent of the lenses receiving in-house A-R coating and 100 percent of the jobs undergoing surfacing and finishing (because the lab

only services Costco locations, there is no need for uncut work). Typically, work is in the lab for less than three days, and back to the Costco member customer within five days.

Motivation to Automate: Like many labs, Costco Optical wanted to eliminate non-value-added steps throughout the manufacturing process, while also reducing human error and labor time spent on transport.

“With automation we could get more accurate results in quality and throughput,” said Jeff Konstanzer, Assistant General Manager at the lab. “Better technology contributes to better quality—and with smarter conveyor, a better work flow. The labor we now save is redistributed to support growth. Our productivity continues to become more efficient and standardized. In automation, it's easier to find root causes of issues and find solutions, whereas with human error, it's not an exact science.”

Automation Transition At-a-Glance: The lab started ramping up its automation in the late 1990s, and it hasn't stopped since. Here's the general timeline and major stages:

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- 1998-2004: Installed various pieces of equipment (auto-tapers, surface auto-blockers, Satisloh VPRO generators and ES2 edgers) with minimal conveyor support.
- 2005: Installed a conveyor to support A&R automated finish blockers.
- 2006: Added a fifth Satisloh VPRO generator to an existing system and conveyor.
- 2007-2008: Installed an additional conveyor for Satisloh ES2 edgers, to meet increased volume.
- 2008: Added Satisloh VFT Cut-to-Polish generators, Opto-polishers and MEI edgers with a conveyor for support.
- 2009: Upgraded to a new technology conveyor.
- 2012: Expanded the production facility to the full 130,000 square feet (from 36,000 previously), upgrading to new 100 percent Cut-to-Polish Generators and Polishers; the lab also doubled its machinery and capacity in all departments with conveyor to support.
- 2013-present: The lab continues to add various machinery and automation to fit production needs as technology allows, including the addition of a transport robot this year.

According to Konstanzer, implementing automation in stages was definitely the right approach. “First of all, the cost, technology available and the needs of the business are constantly changing,” he said. “When implementing any new process, especially automation, we found it imperative to improve slowly, work out all of the kinks and sustain before moving on.”

Current Automation Solutions: Today, Costco Optical Lab has a vast lineup of automation solutions, including:

- A transport conveyor moving jobs between machines throughout the lab.
- Auto-tapers, auto-blockers, Satisloh Orbit Generators and Duo-Flex polishers; Opto-tech polishers, an auto-detape/deblocker and a transport robot for alloy and blocks in the surfacing department for full cut-to-polish production.
- Crest stripping machines, SCL dip coaters, Essemtec cure ovens and Satisloh box coaters in the AR department.
- MEI TBA Bisphera, Doublers and Racer edgers, plus Focovision lens analyzers (TBA capabilities eliminated the need for blocking lenses and therefore deblocking) in the finishing department.

Driving Acceptance by Lab Staff: “Employees were made aware that this automation would not threaten their employment—it would simply allow them to learn new tasks and positions,” said Konstanzer. “When employees see the evolution of technology in their area, it can be exciting—but only if communicated positively and in advance. Of course there are the few that don’t believe the message; however, they soon come around when they find their jobs are secure and that automation makes their tasks easier.”

Results: For Costco Optical Labs, automation has opened the door to a continuous improvement journey in “Lean Manufacturing.” It has also reduced waste and eliminated many non-value added steps in the process, allowing the lab to redistribute labor during considerable growth, which equates to a large savings and higher employee morale through the addition of new skills.

“The quality of our product has improved, and with it, our first-time yield,” said Konstanzer. “With these improvements, our turnaround time has been significantly decreased to the delight of the customer. Overall, automation has played one of the largest parts in remaining on the cutting edge of a very competitive industry. By taking the manual labor out of the equation, it has given us the time and opportunity to focus more on the training of our employees and development of future leaders.”

21st Century Optics

Overview: 21st Century Optics is a 30,000-square-foot lab based in Long Island City, NY, that employs 110 people and produces approximately 17,000 lenses per week.

Motivation to Automate: Starting in 2012, 21st Century Optics embarked on a three- to five-year journey to automate both its digital surfacing and finishing departments. 21st Century Optics is an Essilor Partner Lab. Due to the demands and needs of the greater New

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York market, the lab wanted to be on the forefront of new technologies and innovation. It also wanted to serve the needs and expectations of the marketplace through the best technologies available.

“We wanted to give our customers better consistency and better quality, and to be more competitive in the marketplace,” said Loic Anne, the lab’s General Manager. “Customer demands in the New York metro market are unique. Speed and quality are critical—everyone wants everything yesterday—or in a ‘New York Minute.’”

Automation Transition At-a-Glance: The lab automated the surfacing department with two new Satisloh VFT Orbit systems, and outfitted the finishing department with two Santinelli/Nidek AES-2200 robotic edging systems, each containing two SE-gogo-Supra edgers. These changes were phased in over a three- to-five-year period in order to ensure proper training for technicians and minimal disruptions in production—always with the objective of maintaining consistent quality and service levels for customers.

Driving Acceptance by Lab Staff: “Change is always a difficult proposition for people,” said Anne. “Because of this fact, we chose to engage our staff before, during and after the transition in order to involve them in the process and thereby get both their buy-in as well as their critical feedback.”

Due to the sophistication of the technologies, automation training was a challenge. However, the lab viewed the transition as an opportunity to step-up the level of their employees, effectively creating more qualified and technical positions within the laboratory. These positions required advanced skill-sets in terms of maintenance, calibration and robotics.

Results: “Since we began automating our laboratory, we definitely have a better consistency in the quality of work we are providing to our customers and also in our hourly production capacity,” said Anne. “In addition, the expertise of our employees has stepped up with more qualified and technical duties, such as calibration, maintenance other important details.”

Because an investment in automation is significant, the return on investment is not necessarily immediate. 21st Century Optics accepted this fact because automation was an investment in the future of the laboratory,

TOP TIPS ON TRAINING

When it comes to integrating automation technology, minimal training doesn’t cut it. Employees need to understand every facet of the automation process fully and completely. Consider these staff training tips:

- Be prepared to maintain and troubleshoot the automation equipment yourself. That usually means higher-skilled staff with deeper knowledge of how the machine works.
- Create “standard operating procedures” with pictures and instructions for each stage, using simple, clear and direct language.
- Prioritize employee engagement. Create “workshop groups” in which supervisors and employees define their workstations (including layout, materials needed, standard operating procedures) to increase personal ownership.
- Don’t quit. Training and cross-training should be ongoing.
- When new machinery is installed, have the vendor conduct employee training. This is well worth the additional expense.
- Send your maintenance technicians to the equipment manufacturer’s facility for more in-depth training on all aspects of the new technology. They’ll come back knowing how to take the machine apart and put it back together, along with deeper knowledge on problem diagnosis.
- When vendors come in to perform preventive maintenance, let your techs shadow them.
- Train staff members on “Lean Principles and Leadership,” (visit: <https://www.lean.org/>).



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enabling this organization to stay competitive in the marketplace and invest in the satisfaction of its customers. Down the road, 21st Century Optics would like to automate final inspection (like many European labs).

“Today, thanks to automation, we can literally and metaphorically deliver on our commitment to offer better speed, quality and consistency to our customers,” said Anne. “We pride ourselves on being a lab that’s easy to do business with, and in a competitive landscape like New York, that’s a huge value to our customers. We understand New York and New Yorkers, and with automation, we’re able to put our money where our mouth is.”

FEA Industries

Overview: Occupying approximately 36,000 square feet, FEA Industries is a full-service lab based in Morton, Pa., with 59 employees in manufacturing and shipping, plus another 17 employees in customer service, sales and administrative staff. This lab produces between 9,000 and 12,500 jobs per week.

Motivation to Automate: FEA Industries’ decision to shift to automation was driven largely by its transition to free-form processing. Over the past four years, this lab has spent more than \$7 million on new technology, gradually adding more and more robotics to the production processes as their needs have grown. This has resulted in more than \$5 million in savings on labor and spoilage alone.

“One primary reason we added automation was to drive reliability in the process. Another reason was to minimize staffing. Three years ago we had 120 employees. Now we have 75 and can do triple the volume,” said Bill Heffner, the lab’s Director of Marketing, IT and Sales. “Take running a generator, for example. Did we really need to have a person there to open the machine, insert a lens, wait until it’s done, take the lens out and repeat? Simple tasks like these can be easily automated. We knew that saving money on people was not the main reason to automate. Reliability and consistency were. When competing in today’s market, factors such as turnaround and dependability are key.”

Current Automation Solutions: Today, FEA Industries has automation throughout the lab. The bulk of their automated surfacing equipment comes from Schneider

Optical Machines, which includes generating, polishing, engraving, de-blocking, de-taping, and lens cleaning (installation currently in progress). This is complimented by automated taping, blocking, and lens marking from Optotech. Finally, their automated inspection machinery is provided by A&R.

“Most of the automation in our lab deals with maintaining consistent work flow, which helps maximize our machine production time,” explained Heffner. “Being able to automate processes makes it much easier to run longer hours, since it requires fewer people to get out more work. This is especially useful for overnight shifts, when it’s difficult to get workers. The ease of use of the machinery also makes it much easier to cross-train staff, which again helps you maintain consistent output levels.”

Another critical part of FEA Industries’ automation solution is the software that drives it. Using a heavily customized version of Optifacts, FEA can easily prioritize jobs, handle delays, manage remakes and many other administrative tasks. “The faster these things can get done, the faster we can respond to our customers’ needs,” said Heffner. “For example, we’ve made it possible for customers to place, modify and cancel orders online—all without needing to speak with someone in customer service. This has been especially useful when customers have needed to place an order when our phones are closed or when they’ve needed to cancel an order. If they couldn’t do it online, they’d have to wait until the phones were open on Monday.”

Driving Acceptance by Lab Staff: While automation definitely causes a culture shift in the way employees work, automated labs still need people to maintain machines, clear errors and fix issues that arise. In fact, Heffner said his lab ended up needing fewer workers with a higher skill level so they could troubleshoot error messages with the machine, clear problems and do maintenance. “Fortunately, most automated equipment is fairly simple for an operator to get going again,” said Heffner. “Even if they don’t know how to fix a specific error with a job, they can still recover it and keep going, keeping the ‘problem job’ for someone with more specific knowledge to fix.”

Results: “Automating the lab has given us not only a boost in the amount of work we can produce, but also the consistency in what we produce,” Heffner said. “That consistency is critical for reliable turnaround times, as well as happy customers.”

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Walman Optical Service Center

Overview: The expansion of Walman's Optical Service Center in Brooklyn Park, Minn., was completed and fully operational in May of 2011. This state-of-the-art, 50,000-square-foot facility operates 24/7, applying the industry's most advanced digital surfacing and A-R coating technologies to support 31 branch offices in 19 states. The lab employs 150 people (with seasonal fluctuations) and produces about 26,000 jobs per week.

Motivation to Automate: Walman wanted to remain competitive with off-shore production, while reducing its cost-per-lens, and to improve quality and turnaround time of finished products.

Automation Transition At-a-Glance: The transition started in 2010 and reached a major milestone in 2015 with the addition of an automated digital surfacing line containing 10 digital generators, four automated laser marketing systems and 15 soft lap polishers, all interfaced with an automated conveyor system.

"Our initial project was a large integration of equipment onto the automated conveyor line, which can be expanded over time to accommodate expected growth," explained Chris Bowers, Operations Manager. "We also kept our toric cell running during the transition to allow enough time to transition to the digital process and to ease the company's move to digital processing."

Current Automation Solutions: Today, the Walman Optical Service Center also uses an automated conveyor system that interfaces all automated systems and a centralized swarf management system managing 13 generators, which orchestrates cooling and efficient removal of waste from the coolant stream.

Driving Acceptance by Lab Staff: For the Walman Optical Service Center, gaining total staff buy-in took about six months. "Training became a process of teaching and learning new skill sets that were not previously used in the facility," said Bowers. "Ultimately, we achieved our training goals through the development of written work instructions, on-the-job training and written preventive maintenance documents. Cross-training the operators three-deep took approximately a year until we were comfortable that we had backup personnel for all functions." ■

DOLLARS AND SENSE: CONSIDERING AUTOMATION COSTS

In these times of tight budgets, automation needs to make sense for an organization, based on factors like volume, error rates, labor costs, growth predictions, ROI and more. While the financial analysis for every laboratory will be different, here's some general guidance:

- Smart conveyors are similarly priced, regardless of vendor. Transport between machinery is the easiest way to deliver ROI in a high-volume situation.
- Automated generators to produce digital progressives can cost more than \$200,000, and polishers to match are about the same. If a lab chooses to stay with conventional designs, the generators and manual finers/polishers are much less expensive.
- Return on investment is typically less than three years (often closer to one to two years).
- Fully automated solutions that include smart conveyors connected to PLCs and lots of equipment can often cost millions. Smaller labs can automate less expensively with gravity conveyors and small initial changes, which can still deliver an immediate return.
- To prepare for a financial discussion around automation, you need to know several things: What's your budget? How many jobs per day? How much space do you have to work with?

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Too Soon to Sigma?

NO LAB IS TOO SMALL, AND THERE'S NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT.

By **ROBERT MINARDI**

While attending Vision Expo West in 2016, I had dinner with some industry regulars that have more than a century of combined experience in the optical field. The topic of Six Sigma briefly came up, and I mentioned that it doesn't seem to be a priority in the optical industry.

One of my dinner companions said, "The really big labs have guys that do that, but the smaller labs don't really need it."

I was a little taken aback by this reply at first. However, then I asked myself: "Does a lab need to be a certain size to implement Six Sigma?"

Before we get into that, we should define what Six Sigma is. There are two definitions. One is statistical and the other is the methodology.

What is a "Six Sigma?"

The statistical representation of a Sigma is determined by the standard deviation formula:

$$\text{Sigma or } (\sigma) = \sqrt{\left(\frac{\sum(x - \bar{x})^2}{(n - 1)}\right)}$$

Without getting “mathy,” a Sigma level describes how close you are to perfection. The higher the Sigma level, the closer you are to having zero defects, as illustrated in the following table:

Sigma Level	Defects per Million Opportunities	Yield
6	3.4	99.99966%
5	230	99.977%
4	6,210	99.38%
3	66,800	93.32%
2	308,000	69.15%
1	690,000	30.85%

The Sigma Level on the left corresponds to average number of defects you would generally see in one million production opportunities—which is not a completed job but rather an opportunity (or production step) during which a defect may occur; in fact, one process step may have many defect opportunities. For example, surface blocking defects may include off-axis, unwanted prism, eye-4-eye and scratches; among others. That’s at least four opportunities for a defect at one workstation.

The resulting yield, then, is the percentage of “good products” produced.

To put sigma levels in perspective, if you played two rounds of golf per week, a two sigma level of play would mean missing about six putts per round. Not bad. According to Nick Wreden, in the book *Profit Brand: How to Increase the Profitability, Accountability and Sustainability of Brands*, a Six Sigma level of play would mean you missed a putt every 163 years! Tiger who?

Basically, a Six Sigma level of defects is darn near perfect. Admittedly, this probably isn’t attainable for an optical lab. So, what are we talking about here?

The Method

The Six Sigma methodology was introduced in the mid-1980s by Motorola engineer Bill Smith. The goal of was to diagnose and eliminate variation in a process, thereby reducing defects and allowing you to provide the highest-quality, lowest-cost product to your customer.

Jack Welch of GE defined the methodology as follows: “Six Sigma is a quality program that, when all is said and done, improves your customer’s experience, lowers your costs, and builds better leaders.” Welch implemented the program at GE in late 1995, and by 1999 was named “Manager of the Century” by *Fortune* magazine. During his tenure, GE’s value rose a staggering 4,000 percent.

The DMAIC Approach

DMAIC (pronounced dah-MAY-ik) is an acronym for the five phases of a Six Sigma project: Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve and Control. These phases are carried out, one after another, until the project’s conclusion. The number of tools available for each phase is vast. Let’s just look at a very basic definition of each phase.

The Define Phase: During the define phase, you determine what your issues are based on the voice of the customer. Their complaints and concerns should be the driving force behind project selection.

The following story demonstrates why this is important: Company XYZ makes spot-welded metal shelves. The engineers at XYZ noticed bumps on the sides of the shelves caused by the welding process. In an effort to get rid of these bumps, the company spent millions of dollars in time and materials with little progress. One day, a customer arrived and the lead engineer points out they’ve started to see progress on the weld bump issue. The customer looked at the engineer and said “Weld bumps? I don’t care about the bumps. I came here to talk about the front of the shelves being crooked!”

This is a humorous, albeit cringe-worthy, example of the importance of listening to the customer’s needs.

Interestingly, a customer doesn’t have to be the actual customer. Anywhere materials are handed from one person to another is usually considered a supplier/customer relationship. For example, in the bench department, final inspection is the customer of insertion. If the inspectors are complaining about lenses being smudged from insertion, you could consider that a customer complaint.

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The Measure Phase: The objectives during the measure are to collect data and measure what you can do right now versus where you need to be. For example, if you need to move jobs through a given area faster, you need to find out how long it currently takes and how long it should take to meet customer demands. Detailed and accurate data is essential here.

The Analyze Phase: At this stage, you analyze the data collected to identify where your issues are. Let the data tell you the root cause of the problem. During this phase, it's important to separate the "vital few from the trivial many." Focus on the fewest improvements that will reap the biggest reward.

The Improve Phase: The improve phase is all about developing a solution. This is where you use the knowledge gained from the previous steps. You know where the variation's coming from, now it's time to put your heads together and fix it.

The Control Phase: In the final phase, you implement the solution and set up a system to ensure it stays in place.

“ If you're asking yourself
“Why can't I just collect
some numbers and find the
problem without all the other
stuff?” What I've found is,
a facility will be strong in
some areas, but not others. ”

Conclusion

In the eyecare profession, we use SOAP (Subjective, Objective Assessment and Plan) as a systematic approach for addressing patient issues. At its core, Six Sigma and DMAIC are the same thing; a step by step method that

gives you a guided path to success.

So, when's the best time to use these techniques? Now! It doesn't matter if you produce 100 jobs a day or 3,000.

If you're asking yourself “Why can't I just collect some numbers and find the problem without all the other stuff?” What I've found is, a facility will be strong in some areas, but not others. For example, a lab may have a well-defined issue, but data collection isn't aggressive, detailed or accurate enough to uncover the root cause. Another common situation arises when a problem is solved, but a solid control system isn't implemented to make sure it doesn't happen again.

This is where you end up with seasonal breakage spikes. There's a reason the automotive, aerospace and technology industries use these techniques religiously. They work.

If you still think your lab isn't “big” enough for Six Sigma, just remember, small labs grow into big labs. Sometimes quicker than you think. ■

Here's a couple of my favorite links to get you started:

www.isixsigma.com

<http://www.allaboutlean.com>

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

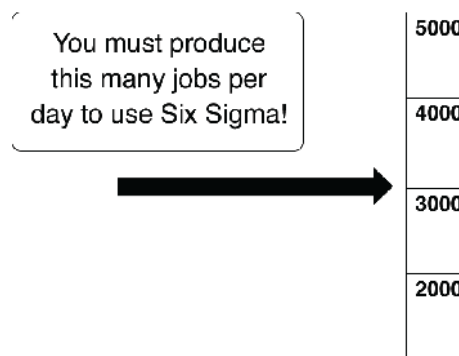


Fig. Six Sigmas isn't this simple.¹

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AVOID COSTLY PENALTIES FOR OVERTIME VIOLATIONS: NEW REGULATIONS RAISE THE STAKES

THE 40-HOUR WORK WEEK LAWS AND YOUR LAB

By **PHILLIP M. PERRY**

Who qualifies for overtime? More people than ever, thanks to new rules from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), mandating which employees are entitled to extra pay when working more than 40 hours a week. If you're like most employers, you may be experiencing a resulting surge in your "nonexempt" workforce in your lab—and in your payroll. Moreover, you may find it difficult to decide who is exempt from overtime.

"The topic of overtime is challenging for most employers," says James B. Sherman, President and CEO of Wes-sels Sherman, a Chicago-based employment law firm

(w-p.com). "The law is not as simple as it looks, and there is a lot to learn about what is required when determining which employees are exempt. It's not just a matter of who is salaried and who is not."

Maybe the law's confusing, but you ignore it at your peril. "The penalties for violating wage and hour laws can be severe," says Matthew C. Heerde, a New York City-based employment law attorney (heerdelaw.com). "They can be devastating for a small business. I have dealt with employers who contemplated bankruptcies after being caught."

Bear in mind, too, as a lab owner, that you are responsible for supporting your exemption decisions. “The law assumes everyone is entitled to receive overtime pay unless the employer can show that certain employees are exempt,” warns Ann F. Kiernan, a New Brunswick, NJ-based employment law attorney and lead trainer at Fair Measures, a management practices consulting firm in Denver (fairmeasures.com).

MORE WORKERS QUALIFY

Federal overtime provisions are contained in the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The big news is that new regulations from the DOL escalate the risk of making employee classification errors. The qualifying salary floor has been raised to \$913 per week (up from a former \$455). Employees paid less must be classified as “nonexempt” (that means “nonexempt from overtime”), and must be paid time-and-a-half when working more than 40 hours per week. Individuals paid more than \$913 weekly are exempt from overtime—maybe. They also have to meet strict—and often confusing—standards about just how they are paid and what job duties they perform.

“A more than doubling of the salary level required for exempt status means employers must make some pretty tough decisions as to whether they want to bump up salaries or reclassify employees,” says S. Libby Henninger, a shareholder in the Washington, DC office of San Francisco-based Littler Mendelson, the nation’s largest employment law firm (littler.com). “It can mean not just the paying of more overtime but also a change in how the business operates.”

For example, businesses may have to mandate that employees newly classified as nonexempt cease doing any work at home, including the answering of email, as such activities may push them continually over the 40-hour weekly work limit, leading to significant increases in payroll costs.

The lower the average pay scale in any business or region, the higher the number of people subject to reclassification under the new rules. “Some of the biggest impact is being felt by smaller businesses, and those in less urban areas where hourly wages and salaries are lower,” says Henninger. “Many of these businesses are reclassifying a third of their workforce.”

ARE YOU COVERED?

What should you do now? Your first step is to determine if your business is covered by the law. Here’s the rule: The FLSA covers any business that generates over \$500,000 in annual gross revenue and is engaged in interstate commerce. Sounds simple, right? In practice, though, things get complicated fast. Smaller enterprises often find themselves subject to wage and hour law.

Take that interstate commerce requirement. Maybe you think your business activities are well contained inside your state lines. Fact is, that’s pretty rare—especially for optical labs. Your business can be deemed as engaged in interstate commerce through acts as seemingly innocuous as receiving goods from out of state, mailing letters to addresses in another state, participating in telephone conversations or email communications across state lines, or even making credit card transactions involving distant financial institutions. “It’s the rare business that is not involved in some way with interstate commerce,” says Heerde.

In addition, the \$500,000 revenue limit will not necessarily save your very small lab from the need to follow the wage and hour law. “A business which does not generate \$500,000 in annual revenues can still be subject to FLSA on a ‘per employee’ basis,” cautions Heerde. Here’s how: If a substantial part of an employee’s work is related to interstate commerce, that employee is likely covered individually. Suppose your employee Andy makes frequent telephone calls to prospects or customers in another state. Or regularly receives goods that have been delivered from another state. Or regularly processes credit card transactions with out-of-state financial institutions. Andy is likely covered by the FLSA, even though other employees in your workplace might not be.

And even the tiniest of businesses face another risk: “State wage and hour and overtime laws often apply to businesses with annual revenues of under \$500,000,” says Heerde.

EMPLOYERS FACE PENALTIES

Failure to meet overtime obligations can spark costly penalties, says Heerde. These start with back pay, which includes underpayment in wages and overtime. If the underpayment is deemed to be willful you may also be subject under Federal law to what is called “liquidated damages,” which amount to a doubling of the back pay amounts. If your actions have violated your state’s wage and hour laws your employees may

continued on page 22

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be awarded additional damages. “You can end up paying damages simultaneously under federal and state law,” says Heerde. Finally, you will also likely need to pay reasonable attorney’s fees incurred by an employee who has brought a lawsuit.

If violations are deemed to be willful, investigators can go back three years when checking your records, notes Kiernan. And you could be penalized for all of the accumulated overtime, plus liquidated damages and attorney fees. “Willful violations can also be prosecuted criminally, and with a second conviction you might go to jail. You might be fined as well.”

Worse yet, owners and even managers can be personally liable for back wages, overtime and attorneys’ fees. “Anyone is at risk who sets work hours, supervises, and is responsible for hiring and firing,” says Sean F. Darke, a senior attorney at Wessels Sherman. “While most states require businesses to indemnify individuals, if the employer goes bankrupt the individuals can be chased by attorneys.”

That brings up an important rule: Don’t try to pretend you don’t know certain employees are working overtime. “You cannot be willfully blind to overtime that is being worked,” says Kiernan. “Suppose, for example, that you leave your office at 5:00 PM and a clerical worker named Sally is still laboring on a project which ends up sitting on your desk when you arrive the following morning. It should be obvious to you that Sally worked overtime.”

One final thing: What happens if federal and state law conflict? “The federal law does not have an exemption for state law,” says Darke. “That means the law with provisions most favorable to an employee is deemed to have control.”

EXEMPT WORKERS

To be exempt from overtime an employee must meet certain standards regarding salary and duties. “An exempt employee must be paid on a salary basis,” says Kiernan. “And that salary must be for the same amount every week, no matter how much or how little the person works, or whether that person’s work was of good or bad quality. Finally, the salary must be at least \$913 weekly.” If any condition is missing, the employee is nonexempt from overtime.

But salary’s not the whole story. To qualify as exempt, an employee must also perform duties of a certain nature. While there are a number of exempt categories, for most readers

of this magazine the important ones are executive and administrative.

“Executive employees are exempt if their duties are exclusively management in nature, if they supervise at least two people, and if they have the ability to hire and fire—or at least contribute substantially to such decisions,” says Kiernan. This would include lab managers.

As for the administrative exemption: The person must perform office or non-manual work related to the general operations of the business, and must exercise discretion or individual judgement with respect to matters of significance. “This person cannot be an assistant,” says Kiernan, “but must be a high level person who exercises independent judgment in making decisions. An example would be the power to rewrite the employee handbook.”

Both the executive and the administrative exemptions require that the individuals make upper level managerial decisions, says Kiernan. Those qualifying for an administrative exemption need to be involved in high level duties such as budgeting, committing money for new initiatives, and project managing. “When deciding who is exempt, one good question to ask is this: ‘Is the person just following a cookbook?’ If so, the person is likely nonexempt and qualifies for overtime pay.”

MORALE PROBLEMS

If you’re like most employers, the new regulations are throwing a significant number of employees into your nonexempt pool, making them subject to overtime. That can create a significant morale problem. “For many professional people there is a negative connotation about being deemed an hourly worker,” says Henninger. “Reclassifying them as non-exempt may make them feel they are being demoted, and that a lot of their flexibility is being taken away since they have to start tracking their hours.”

What to do? “Our advice is to emphasize to people that they are not being demoted, and that the change does not speak to the importance of their position,” says Henninger. “The fact is that more employees are becoming overtime eligible because of a change in the federal law.”

Here’s another idea: “Consider having everyone in the lab, from the president on down, start recording their hours worked,” says Kiernan. ■

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SPOTLIGHT ON...



Attending the Global Optics "open house" are (from left): Bryan Schueler of Walman Optics, Joe Cherry of Cherry Optical, Barbara Vitchus of Global Optics, Adam Cherry of Cherry Optical and Chris Williams of Global Optics.

GLOBAL OPTICS OPEN HOUSE

GREEN BAY, Wis.—Global Optics Inc., which provides consolidated purchasing and proficient logistical solutions and distribution to independent optical labs, is experiencing somewhat of a renaissance as it repositions itself for the future.

The warehousing company has begun accepting associate members, expanded its focus on Third-Party Logistics (3PL) services and, among other alterations, reached its first agreement with an international lens manufacturer to distribute the manufacturers' products in the U.S. market.

Consolidation and other changes in the business environment necessitated some of the updates that are under way, Barbara Vitchus, president and general manager of Global Optics, said during an "open house" at the company's 34,000-square-foot warehouse in November.

"We started down [the road] of saying, 'What would a new Global look like and what direction are we going to head in,'" she explained. "We're really a supply chain for the optical business... This is a great place to be and I am excited for the future."

Founded in 1971 with eight "shareholder" labs composing the ownership group, Global Optics now serves more than 200 optical laboratories with product sourced

from more than 20 vendors. Global Optics continues to offer its "equity owner" membership, which allows independent labs to become a shareholder in the company and to gain access to additional benefits.

Several members of the buying group Optical Synergies Group, beginning in June 2015, became the first associate members of Global Optics, and the number of associate members in Global has now reached the 40-plus range," Vitchus said.

"We are pleased at the prospect of expanding our network and building new relationships with more independent laboratories," she added. "In addition to offering our members a wide selection of products and cost-savings, we also welcome our members to share ideas and goals with us and each other to enable business success."

Global is currently shipping in the mid-30,000s of lenses per day to more than 200 different locations, and the "fill" rate is in the 99.5 percent to 99.6 percent range on a regular basis, Vitchus said.

The meeting at the company's offices also served as an introduction to the market of Global Optics' Third Party Logistics (3PL) services, which helps manufacturers streamline product distribution and supply chain functions.

The company's first foray into 3PL came earlier this year when Global established a relationship with Thai Optical Group that calls for Global Optics to maintain an inventory of the manufacturer's full lens product line.

Thai Optical manufactures the new Tribrid lenses, a high-performance high-index lens made from material developed by PPG using an advanced approach. Global Optics is the first U.S. distributor of Tribrid lenses in the U.S. market.

"The 3PL capability is a very large deal for us," Vitichus said in an interview. "Bringing in Thai Optical Group and being their distribution center here in the United States is just the beginning. There are certainly other groups that we would like to do that for." She acknowledged that negotiations are under way for similar arrangements, but she declined to provide additional details.

Global Optics now serves more than 200 optical laboratories with an unmatched inventory of products from more than 20 vendors. The company inventories most major lens manufacturers' products in depth and has the ability to ship overnight across the country. Any independent optical

laboratory in the U.S. can apply to become a Global Optics Associate Member. There is no fee to become an associate member; only a standard credit application and business references are required. In addition, Global Optics continues to offer the original Equity Owner membership level through which an independent laboratory can become a partial owner of Global Optics and gain access to additional benefits.

In addition to Tribrid, the company also offers several blue-light protective lens products, including BluTech lenses, Essilor Smart Blue Filter lenses, VISION EASE Clear Blue Filter lenses and SOMO Blue Block lenses.

Global Optics is governed by the following board members:

- Bryan Schueler, Vice President and General Manager, Walman Optical (Chairman of the Board)
- Keith Heckenkemper, President, RXO Tulsa
- Joe Cherry, Vice President, Cherry Optical
- Barbara Vitichus, President and General Manager, Global Optics



Joe Cherry of Cherry Optical examines a lens with assistant warehouse manager Kaylee Plog of Global Optics



A shipment from Thai Optical Group arrives at the Global Optics warehouse.



Global Optics has established a relationship with Thai Optical Group that calls for the company to maintain an inventory of the manufacturer's full lens product line.



Jobs are lined up for processing at Global Optics' Green Bay facility.



A Global Optics staffer shows off the company's inventory management system during the November open house.

LABTECH

Satisloh Signs Agreement with Weima

Satisloh has signed an exclusive worldwide distributor agreement with Germany's Weima GmbH, bringing their 30 years of proven briquetting technology to the ophthalmic manufacturing market.

"This is a tremendous match and a win for ophthalmic labs. Combining Bazell Technologies' coolant management expertise with Weima's vast briquetting experience provides unrivaled swarf management solutions for the industry. Weima's briquetter technology is unequalled – compressing lab waste at a volume of 20:1," said Larry Clarke, Satisloh AG, President & COO. "This relationship will greatly simplify labs' waste disposal."

The Weima Group has installed over 30,000 machines worldwide designed for an extensive range of shredding and briquetting applications with customers in the plastic, wood, metal, and other recycling industries. Weima briquetters press swarf into small, compressed briquettes without using any glues or adhesives. The briquetter can be integrated with existing Bazell coolant management systems.

Briquetting waste materials can reduce volume by up to 95%, providing considerable saving of disposal, transport, and storage costs.

"We are excited that our knowledge and experience can benefit another industry. We look forward to working with Bazell Technologies and Satisloh – leaders in ophthalmic lens manufacturing solutions," said Martin Friz, Managing Partner, Weima.

"As the ophthalmic industry turns its attention to better managing swarf and its disposal, we're proud to offer them proven solutions," said Paul Dick, Managing Director, Bazell Technologies.

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National Optronics Releases New Tabletop Edger



For the inaugural product kick off of their new Quality Manufacturing (QM) series, National Optronics utilized their almost 40 years of edging and finishing experience to develop and build the new QM-X3 edger. Unlike other tabletop edgers, it features the engineering and cutting-edge technology used in industrial edgers, but at a price point normally associated with tabletops—setting a new standard for both productivity, robustness and price.

“This is a real breakthrough in all aspects of edging: speed, reliability, quality, accuracy and features,” said Kevin Paddy, Director-Finishing, National Optronics. “Add the QM-X3’s ability to process complex shapes such as partially shelved lenses as well as its optional variable angle drilling and you have an edger that bridges the gap between large 5-axis edgers and compact 3-axis tabletops.”

According to the company, the QM-X3 is 20-30 percent faster than other tabletop edgers because of its high speed linear axis drives and an innovative, sophisticated mechanical design that eliminates unnecessary movements. This new design not only makes it faster, but also improves motion stability, cutting accuracy, and tolerance—all combining to produce an excellent edge quality. Its tool features a unique dual diamond blade design—drastically increasing tool life while substantially lowering the cost per edge. The industrial design of the edger includes direct drive motors for highest precision and robustness, advanced electronics for faster processing speeds and a high speed, high torque spindle drive capable of over 30,000 RPM.

“Don’t let its robustness and feature-rich construction mislead you; the QM-X3 is a perfect fit for both ECPs and wholesale labs. And its capabilities, small footprint and price point make it ideal for any edging application,” said Paddy. The QM-X3 continues National Optronics’ tradition of green, dry edging—but with a twist: an option of removing the vacuum. Eliminating the vacuum reduces both energy consumption and noise. A disposable bag collects lens debris from the chamber, which just falls into it. The bag is easily removed for simple, environmentally safe disposal. An easy-to-use remote diagnostics function connects the QM-X3 to the internet for the most current software updates and gives National Optronics technicians access to quickly resolve any issues for streamlined support. Like all National Optronics equipment, the QM-X3 is built in the US. The new edger will make its North American debut at Vision Expo East in March. [For more information: http://www.nationaloptronics.com/.](http://www.nationaloptronics.com/)

Satisloh Introduces Digi-Pro: Polish Engineered for Digital Polishing

Satisloh’s new Digi-Pro polish is specifically engineered for the company’s Multi-FLEX and Duo-FLEX digital polishers, using a unique particle shape and hardness to provide increased stock removal and product life. Digi-Pro can be used on all organic lens materials and in any available digital polishing system.

“With traditional systems, labs could tweak things—changing their process as they went along—to achieve the surfaces they wanted,” said Steve Schneider, Satisloh VP, Aftermarket Products/Sales. “Digital polishers are sophisticated and make tremendous demands from the polish and with minimal hands-on operator intervention. So, to maximize equipment performance and surface quality, polishes specially formulated for digital polishing are key for production success in labs today.”

According to Satisloh, Digi-Pro’s viscosity offers consistent flow rates that are key to lens surface quality while its suspension provides consistent results and makes clean up easy. Its frost-resistant chemistry prevents product damage, saving money. It is available in two convenient sizes: one gallon and five gallon pails.



Vision Ease Launches Redesigned Web Site



Vision Ease has launched a newly revamped visionease.com. This redesigned website offers a responsive design, easy navigation, and enhanced tools and search functions that are designed to exemplify the company's brand strategy and fully support its customers to allow for an individualized website experience.

The site's refreshed and simplified look, combined with enhanced content, improved search functionality, and optimization for all devices allows Vision Ease customers to better interact with and do business with the brand.

"Our new website reinforces our brand strategy that focuses on our commitment to our customers and dedication to understanding the unique needs of the consumers they serve," said Jay Lusignan, Marketing Communications Manager at Vision Ease. "The redesign makes it easier for customers to access the information they need and enhances our ability to connect with the industry through our digital channels in a way that we haven't been able to do on the old site."

The new website features streamlined access to numerous former domains into one single site. Additionally, the site features instant access to tools, resources and materials for customers that include sales and marketing support materials such as point of purchase displays, brochures and technical specifications.

"The updates to our new website support our brand mission and allow us to continue to build our customer relationships in a world that is ever trending digital," said Susie Clark, Digital Marketing Manager. "The new website redesign is the foundation to building meaningful dialogue and interaction that's only available in the digital space." [To view the new website, visit \[www.visionease.com\]\(http://www.visionease.com\).](http://www.visionease.com)

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ABB Optical Group Acquires Diversified Ophthalmics and MidSouth Premier Ophthalmics

ABB Optical Group has acquired Diversified Ophthalmics, Inc., a privately held company based in Cincinnati, Ohio and its partner company MidSouth Premier Ophthalmics, based in Brentwood, Tenn. The terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

A statement issued by ABB said, "Combining the complementary geographic operations of Diversified and MidSouth in the central U.S. with the strong logistics network ABB Optical already has along the East and West coasts, the merger represents a good fit of business models as both organizations currently operate across four major core businesses, [including] distribution of a full range of soft contact lenses; manufacturing and distribution of ophthalmic lenses and eyewear; GP and custom soft manufacturing; and support of practice management and buying groups (ABB Optical's Primary Eyecare Network and Diversified's ECP Network)."

Angel Alvarez, CEO of ABB Optical Group, commented, "This merger represents a tremendous investment we are making not only in the future of optometry, but also in our valued customers. The essence of what ABB is and what ABB stands for will never change. We always have been and continue to be a trusted business partner to eyecare professionals, delivering the best services and programs to help them better serve their patients in an evolving marketplace. This merger allows us to expand our footprint geographically, and that will result in even greater success for our customers and convenience for their patients."

Ronald F. Cooke, OD, president and CEO of Diversified Ophthalmics, said, "We are thrilled to be joining the ABB family. Together, we will remain steadfast in our commitment to quality and service for independent eyecare professionals by providing innovative programs and services that will energize the eyecare industry. We are excited about the future."

Customers of ABB Optical Group, Diversified Ophthalmics and MidSouth Premier Ophthalmics will experience business as usual, according to ABB's statement. The company said it has committed to further invest in facilities, inventory, technology and people to enhance overall customer experience and range of offerings.

Western Optical Supply Introduces #8030S MicroTool Nose Pad Adjusting Plier



Western Optical has introduced its latest MicroTool: the Nose Pad Adjusting Plier. MicroTools are designed for professionals "on-the-go." With an average length of 5", they are designed to be "big on function, small in size and price," the company said. All MicroTools comply with TSA regulations and can be carried aboard aircraft. The #8030S Nose Pad Adjusting Plier is designed to get into hard to reach places, and it securely and safely adjusts all types of nose pads. The cupped jaw for cradling the pad is matched to a slotted jaw for securely bracing the nose pad box and arm, which makes repositioning the nose pad easy. [For additional information: www.westernoptical.com.](http://www.westernoptical.com)

Rodenstock to Launch New U.S. Sales Subsidiary

Rodenstock GmbH, a leading global manufacturer of lenses and eyewear, is entering the U.S. eyewear market in January 2017 with its own sales subsidiary. Rodenstock USA LLC is based in Sheridan, Wyoming, and is headed by American Chris Juergens, previously of Silhouette Optical Ltd.

Rodenstock, a German company with 140 years of tradition in optical innovation, supplies independent opticians worldwide with high-quality lenses and frames, designed and engineered in Germany.

"The establishment of a U.S. sales subsidiary marks another step in our successful growth and internationalisation strategy," Oliver Kastalio, CEO of Rodenstock, said. "We are entering the world's largest eyewear market with products that stand out thanks to their high quality and German innovation and design."

Under previous ownership, Rodenstock entered the U.S. market in the 1970s, but retreated at the turn of the millennium after an unsuccessful venture into new lens technology. Now headquartered in Munich, Germany, Rodenstock GmbH has a global work force of approximately 4,500 employees in more than 85 countries.

Signet Armorlite Launches KODAK Lens Location in St. Louis



As part of the next strategic phase of its U.S. retail initiative, Signet Armorlite, Inc. has launched KODAK Lens | Eye Deology Vision in the St. Louis metro area. The KODAK Lens retail initiative provides independent eye-care professionals that are committed to dispensing KODAK Lenses with

the opportunity to leverage the strength, recognition and heritage of the KODAK brand in their local markets.

In St. Louis, Signet Armorlite is partnering with Robert Dobyne of Eye Deology Vision, located near the St. Louis airport in the heart of the revitalized community of St. Ann, Mo. The KODAK Lens | Eye Deology Vision practice is strategically positioned along a main artery (U.S. Route 67) near Interstate 180 and across from the renovated, open air "The Crossings at Northwest" shopping mall. Branding his location as KODAK Lens provides instant name recognition and cachet to Dobyne's eye care practice.

"KODAK is one of the most trusted and recognized brands in the United States and Signet Armorlite holds the exclusive license in the ophthalmic space through 2029," said Edward DeRosa, Executive Vice President of Signet Armorlite. "Mr. Dobyne has built a successful career in eye care and is a huge advocate of the KODAK Lens brand and its products. With his appreciation of the Kodak brand, his deep roots in the St. Louis area and his desire to open his first location in the heart of the city, KODAK Lens | Eye Deology Vision is the natural choice to further develop our retail initiative in this market."

"I grew up in the St. Louis community and am so pleased to be able to serve its families with uncompromising levels of vision care and service," Dobyne added. "Partnering with KODAK Lens provides me with a unique opportunity to launch my business with the strength and heritage of the world-renowned Kodak brand. The heritage of Kodak and the strength of KODAK Lens and its full-line up of preferred products provide the perfect way to differentiate my practice as a leading provider in the community. I really couldn't be more happy and excited with this venture and look forward to its growth and success."

The Grand Opening event was held February 15th. The Signet Armorlite retail initiative continues to expand with the rebranding of several other practices already underway. For more information: http://kodaklens.com/en/pro/pro_services.

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LABNOTES

Schneider DigiCON 2017 Dates Announced

Schneider is proud to announce the dates for its next DigiCON US event to be held in Frisco, Texas, May 10-12, 2017. This will be its biggest DigiCON event ever, highlighted by fantastic new technology around this year's theme: Eye on the Ball. The event offers learning, networking and a look into the future of lens processing from the industry's leading innovator. Look for your invitations and registration opportunity soon.

With the theme of "Eye on the Ball", we focus on the latest innovations from the world leader in technology for the labs- while introducing a very special new system that allows you to get more out of your existing equipment! Join us Wednesday evening for a welcome reception followed by the program that takes place Thursday and Friday. On Thursday evening, we will host a special networking event that includes cocktails and dinner along with an opportunity to play ball on a professional field while taking your swings against professional pitchers- for those willing.

This exciting two-day program will focus on a systems approach with Modulo as a highlight. Along with Modulo, you'll see the world premiere of tremendous new machines and technology. Total process control along with new green-focused processes will be on display.

Always a must-attend seminar, the 'Digital Surfacing Troubleshooting' class is back with new and updated information to help you get the most from your processes. **For more information: www.schneider.com.**

SeikoVision Releases Digital Eye Strain Patient Education Tools



SeikoVision has released a series of print-ready infographics to aid eye care professionals in educating patients about digital eye strain. The series includes one infographic about digital eye strain symptoms called "9 Signs You're Experiencing Digital Eye Strain" and one infographic on ways to avoid digital eye strain called "10 Quick Tips for Avoiding Digital Eye Strain."

Each infographic measures 11" x 17" and, once printed, they can be displayed separately or back-to-back in the waiting room, exam area or patient handout packet. Eye care professionals can earn similar pieces and a variety of other marketing, analytics and business growth through the Seiko Elite rewards program. **To learn more about the program, eye care professionals are encouraged to visit the company website at www.seikovision.com.**

Wagner & Kuehner Awarded Best Optical Supplier



Wagner & Kuehner have been voted Best Optical supplier by German Opticians. The Wagner & Kuehner fashion eyewear collections are distributed by MOSAIC Eyewear based here. Wagner & Kuehner GmbH, Bad Kreuznach, Germany has been voted Top Optical Supplier in Germany by Opticians and Optical Professionals in a recent benchmark Market Report. The Survey is produced by Markt intern, a respected market information group that has been established for almost fifty years. Markt intern provides industry professionals and buyers with unbiased market information, reviews and assessments. Markt intern is particularly well respected as it is an independent voice and not supported by any advertising revenues. Conducted every two years, the survey of Opticians and Frame Buyers is very comprehensive with multiple categories including areas that judge opinions on Product Quality, Product Design, Marketing, Style / Fashion Trends, After Sales Service and Customer Satisfaction. **For more information: www.wagner-kuehner.ce.**

Essilor Announces Organizational Changes



Essilor of America has made several leadership and organizational changes designed to "support the company's deep and lasting commitment to the optical industry and to the success of its customers."

The moves will focus on improving and innovating operations; expanding lab partnerships with ECPs; and increasing business with retail, managed care and consolidated ECP groups. Among the changes:

Mike Atkinson joined Essilor in October 2016 as senior vice president, Industrial Operations. In this new role, which is designed to optimize the manufacturing and supply chain systems across Essilor's entire North American footprint, Atkinson reports to company president Eric Leonard and is responsible for improving customer experience in terms of service, product quality and turn time; and developing and implementing new and innovative operational models.

Rick Gadd has been named president, Essilor Lab Group, and will focus on developing the company's business with independent ECPs. Gadd joined Essilor in 2011 and most recently led the Retail and Managed Care, Integrated Independents, Safety, IDD, Classic Optical and KbCo groups.

Steve Nussbaumer has been named senior vice president and general manager for key accounts and will be responsible for Retail, Managed Care, and the Key Account Strategies and Solutions team, as well as consolidated regional ECP groups. Nussbaumer previously served as president, Essilor Lab Group.

HOYA Vision Care Acquires Pinnacle Optical

HOYA Vision Care, a division of HOYA Group announced today the acquisition of Pinnacle Optical, LLC headquartered in Birmingham, Ala.

"The acquisition of Pinnacle will be combined with our existing Birmingham operation into one laboratory location to strengthen our local presence. This is a growing market with exciting opportunities for HOYA's science innovation and technology to help advance practice profitability and provide the best vision solutions for patients," said Barney Dougher, President of HOYA Vision Care, North America. "Our strategic initiative is to help independent practices differentiate their brands and overcome commoditization, and to do that we are continuing to enhance our physical presence in key markets."



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Green Brothers Open New Wholesale Lab

Mike and Bernie Green have opened a new, independent wholesale laboratory, Green Optics. The new, state-of-the-art, 24,000-square-foot facility is outfitted with the latest technology for digital lens processing, dip hardcoating, anti-reflective coatings and mirror coatings.

Green Optics is enabled to produce Varilux and Shamir digital lens designs as well as their own FormTech family of premium lens products. Also featured, is on-site production of Crizal and VistaPure A-R coatings, as well as Green Optics' exclusive SunRider Performance Mirrors.

"By breaking the industry trend of out-sourcing, Green Optics is able to provide a 24- to 48-hour average turn time to our customers," said Mike Green, President of Green Optics. "Our goal is to be easy to do business with, offering high quality products and the very best customer service, with consistently fast delivery times. The continued consolidation of optical laboratories has resulted in fewer choices, slower turn times, decreased quality, and a corporate mentality that makes life more difficult for ECPs. Green Optics is committed to dismissing that mentality and sees an opportunity to stand apart from the rest."

Green Optics' core management team is comprised of handpicked industry veterans, with an average of 25 years' experience. "My brother and I know that to be successful, we need to surround ourselves with the very best people in the industry," said Bernie Green, Executive Vice President of Green Optics. "Our talented team knows the industry inside and out and has the experience and authority to do the right thing for our customers."



Green Optics is based in Auburn Hills, MI. Founders Mike and Bernie Green also founded Great Lakes Coating Laboratory in 1994. Great Lakes grew into a successful laboratory before being sold to SOLA in 2006, and is now part of the Zeiss lab network. Green Optics is designed to produce 1,500 pairs of RX lenses and 4,000 pairs of custom lens coating per day for customers across the U.S. **For more information, visit <http://GreenOpticsUSA.com>.**

Seiko Appoints Scott as GM



HOYA Vision Care, announced the appointment of Bruce Scott as General Manager of Seiko Optical of America. Scott brings more than 25 years of industry experience to Seiko Optical. In his previous role as Regional Vice President with Essilor, he directed all aspects of major business divisions, including sales to multiple channels, business and customer development, product and sales marketing, customer service and manufacturing excellence.

"Bruce's extensive knowledge of operations, customer service, sales and product development make him a perfect fit for Seiko and Hoya product distribution business," said Barney Dougher, President of HOYA Vision Care, Americas. He continued, "As a leader, Bruce grew revenue and found efficiencies in his business units. He is also a person that nurtures future organizational leaders. His ability to develop talent will be critical as we continue to grow."

Scott will be leading Seiko Optical of America, which also represents the Hoya brands with a focus on the wholesale and retail sectors of the industry, and he noted, "I'm very excited about the future of the Seiko brand in the North American market. The opportunity to grow Seiko through valued partnerships and superior products is tremendous and we look forward to continued success." Bruce holds a Bachelors of Business Management from Oklahoma Christian University. At the beginning of his optical career he helped build a large national retail chain. Bruce has also participated in the Vision Council's Executive Summit and Optical Laboratory Division.

OLSS Awarded Department of Defense Contract

Optical Lab Software Solutions, Inc. is proud to announce a contract award granted by the Naval Medical Logistics Command (NMLC) to provide lab management software and support services to the Department of Defense Optical Fabrication Enterprise (OFE), a tri-services organization comprised of 27 Navy and Army labs strategically located worldwide. The OFE mission is to Support Force Health Protection and combat readiness of the Armed Forces by providing timely, economical, worldwide fabrication and delivery of high-quality eyewear to our Warfighters. The OFE has produced up to 1.7 million pairs of prescription eyeglasses annually and with little notice, can experience large fluctuations in demand based on troop deployments.

Under this contract, OLSS will deliver OPTUITIVE® LMS to 20 labs to support the OFE's vision for an integrated Defense Optical Fabrication Enterprise Management System (DOFEMS) based upon an industry standardized, enterprise-wide, global-reaching, optical fabrication Laboratory Management System. OPTUITIVE is a browser-based LMS solution designed specifically for management of business and production processes in high volume optical labs. OPTUITIVE is highly scalable to accommodate OFE's multi-site organization, and will provide a solid strategic and cost saving advantage with centralized lab management capabilities, real-time situational awareness in each location, and access to actionable intelligence through a consolidated dashboard reporting tool.

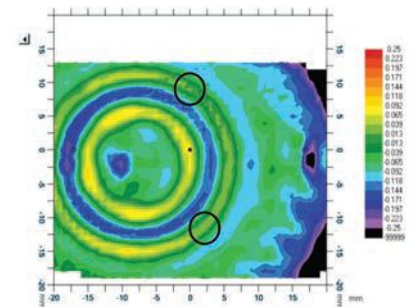
"We are thrilled to have been chosen for this engagement and believe the award is a true testament to our past performance with the Navy and other strategic customers," said Kathy Rismiller, President for OLSS. "We value our partnership with the Navy and look forward to leveraging our experience and expertise in systems architecture, software design, and prescription eyewear manufacturing to ensure a strong delivery to the DoD." **For more information about OLSS LMS products and services visit www.olssystem.com.**

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WHEN IS IT TIME TO AUTOMATE?



JASON LONG
Optical Sales and
Application Engineer
FlexLink Systems, Inc.

A common mistake for labs is to hold onto the perception that automation is only for large-scale operations. This is simply not the case. Labs that currently have little to no automation can incorporate many small implementations that can have an immediate impact on throughput and efficiency, while at the same time reducing unnecessary breakage.

One example is to have better control over their curing process between blocking and generating. The addition of a timed curing conveyor to transport trays from the blocking stations to the generators is a low-cost way to eliminate human intervention while creating a continuous workflow. The trays are timed to arrive at the generator(s) after they have reached their required curing time. This allows your generator/s to operate at a higher level of efficiency than you would if you had an operator manually loading trays into these machines. These operators can then be better utilized at the blocking stations where they can focus on blocking the lenses. Typically these operators would be distracted with trying to keep track of how long the lenses have been curing while simultaneously stacking trays. This simple technique also greatly reduces the risk of operators occasionally dropping stacks of trays as they manually transport them from one process to the next.

FlexLink Systems has designed a solution for this common application. It's a smart cool down conveyor system that we've eloquently named our "Tray Hotel." The tray hotel uses our fully electric elevators with multiple floors/levels of our Vision X conveyor to provide a compact modular solution. This then allows labs to have control over their curing process through the ability to prioritize jobs based on different criteria such as required curing times or dedicated job specifications. The tray hotel can be designed for all sizes of optical labs based on their current production needs and can be easily expanded for future growth requirements.

At FlexLink Systems, we try to make lab automation easy by walking side by side with our customers through the steps and processes necessary for automating their optical labs. FlexLink provides a consultative approach that specifically caters to the optical industry, keeping a sharp focus on your labs future goals. Technology advancements in optical lab automation will continue to evolve with more innovators developing new processing and manufacturing models and procedures. Companies that accept and embrace these new technologies will have a greater advantage over their competitors. Adding automation to an optical lab will improve product quality, optimize labor resources and greatly improve turnaround times while lowering overall operating costs. When is the best time to automate? With more and more optical labs realizing the benefits of automation there is a good chance that the competition already has. Have you?

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GUIDO GROET
Chief Medical Officer
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WHEN TO AUTOMATE...



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

This can be a tricky question to answer since for most labs the answer depends on their individual circumstances. Some will say when they reach “X” amount jobs per day they will bring in automation. Some start right away. The real answer here is when it makes sense for you. To start you should think about the following questions:

1. Will automation save me money and maintain the quality standard we have?
2. Are there tasks in the lab that are best served with automation?
3. Do I have good people that would be better off doing a more value-added task in the lab?

For lots of lab owners the cost of labor can be different based on your region so for some labor costs are not an issue while for others it can cause some sleepless nights. The real question here is #3 above—would I be better off moving good people to tasks that provide real value to the lab and its customers? If the answer is “yes,” then automation is something to look at. Another part to this is how hard it can be to find good people to come to work every day. Once we have good people we want to make sure they feel great about their job and keep them motivated. This can be done by automating tasks that provide minimal value to the lens making process. Functions like lens blocking, loading and unloading polishers and generators or de-blocking and de-taping lenses should be some of the first to be evaluated for automation. This can free up some good people in the lab to do other tasks that provide real value while making the employee feel needed. There are lots of other concerns like space and machine costs you will also need to consider. Have a conversation with your machine suppliers and see what makes sense for you and when. Your suppliers are a great resource of information like ROI calculators, layout and design as well as market trends.

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