It was a commonly held belief that by 2018 we’d be driving flying cars... Little did we know, that the cars wouldn’t (yet) be flying today, but rather that we wouldn’t be driving them. Autonomous cars were one of the big developments out of the recent Consumer Electronics Show and they are poised to disrupt an industry that hasn’t changed much since the first combustion engine was added to a push cart in 1808.

Our point is this: Progress is inevitable. Change is a part of life and our industry, much like the automobile one, is on the verge of an evolution. The independent ECP has the opportunity to be a self-driving car... or a horse drawn buggy. It’s time to fight for your way of life. And to do that you need to arm yourself with as many tools as you can fit in your arsenal. On the following pages, you’ll read about some of the ideas leading the change. Read up. The (r)evolution is now.

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Nicolas Roseillier’s current role as creative director of DE RIGO REM seemed almost fated. As a young man in France, he aspired to opticianry but art school called. Later, he moved to NYC working on architectural installations, art installations and interiors, some for eyewear clients. But as is often the case with the creatively inclined, new challenges beckoned and he “officially” entered the optical industry as creative director for MODO before settling in at De Rigo REM. There he is responsible for the company’s creative vision in the U.S., including show booths. He has come full circle and now uses his unique experience to push the industry forward creatively one trade show at a time. After the merger, he created a new booth for De Rigo REM ... and a new one ... and a new one. “Our new booth [concept] is more of an art installation...changing it every show creates interaction and talk. People start to wonder what we’ll do next,” says Roseillier. Constant change comes with some angst. “Each time I freak out...but when was the last time I freaked out about something I created? It’s part of the process. You can’t avoid being uncomfortable; you just need to embrace it.” That’s his advice for retailers stuck in a rut too. “If there is something you want to try? Do it. You want to change your store? Try it. People are too afraid of what others think...”}

On a blog on DailyOptician.com, Tiffany Firer offered some simple word swaps to keep things exciting in your dispensary. Instead of “plastic frame,” say “acetate” or “zyl.” Instead of “metal frame,” say “titanium” or “stainless steel.” Instead of “thick/chunky,” say “bold.”

Stop saying insurance! e.g., “Your vision insurance will pay for...” Take a tip from Shane Clark, OD, of Infinity EyeCare, in Rapid City, SD. “I’m trying the term ‘vision benefit plan’ instead, because when a patient hears ‘insurance’ they think it should be free,” John Dove of Blackburn Eye Associates in Blackburn, VA agrees. “We’ve been working on ‘vision insurance’ and ‘allvision.’ There is no ‘vision insurance.’ They are discount plans with benefits; they don’t insure against anything.”

If you’re looking for something more advanced, stop saying “AR coating” or “lens coating.” “It should be called a lens treatment,” says Mitchell Kaufman, Marine Park Family Vision, Brooklyn, NY, or “non-glare,” adds Brenda Smale of Smoke Vision Care in Buchanan, MI.

Our last easy switch up, thanks to INVISION columnist Robert Ball, isn’t just in the words you use but the way you think. Don’t upsell...downsell. “Selling could be the most foolish approach to take ever. If you start with the basics and upped, or add on, add on, add on...what your customer’s hear is: ‘cho-cho-cho-cho-ching,’” says Ball. “Selling is the ultimate bait-and-switch.” Instead, start with the very best products you have to offer, then start downselling. “Start chipping away at the features (and therefore the price) by asking, ‘Of the AR coating, the thickness/thinness of the lens, the this, the that...which is something you can live without?’” he suggests.

Words matter and it’s always a challenge striking a balance between sounding like an expert and being a jargon bore.
any ODs do not want to even entertain the idea of conducting a thorough, comprehensive eye exam on a patient hundreds of miles away... but what if that’s the only way that patient will ever see an eye doctor? Telemedicine has many detractors, but for populations in remote or underserved areas it provides a huge opportunity to expand the scope of eyecare. “There is an assumption that we are similar to other disruptive technology companies that don’t provide the ‘in-person’ via video link interaction between patient and doctor,” says Janet Hunter, COMT, Director of Professional Relations for 20/20NOW.

John Marvin, president and CEO of the 120 location group Texas State Optical, has always been fascinated by the success of unconventional brands. “That fascination pushed his organization into the future... or as Marvin would tell it, the present.” “What we consider radical in the optical industry happens every day in other industries... We’re playing catch up.” “Our product is the patient experience and [it] lacks distinction,” he says. “The industry is extremely insular. We benchmark ourselves against ourselves. It should be against the best in healthcare and retail.”

TSO opened its first all-digital location in October in Dallas. It has no front desk. All “paperwork” is done on iPads. All equipment is networked. It offers home delivery and fitting by an optician. All in an effort to move people through the process in less than an hour. “Every 10 minutes over an hour a patient spends in the office, you lose $15 in final spend. Changing the in-store experience is integral in overcoming this,” he says.

The Dallas location is the first of its kind for TSO — a corporate funded, fully digital buildout, sold turnkey to a young OD — but not the last. With this new model, TSO will not only revolutionize eyecare delivery for Texans but also attract an influx of new, tech savvy, forward thinking optometrists to its ranks.

THE PRACTICE OF THE FUTURE

TEXAS STATE OPTICAL

JOHN MARVIN

20/20NOW (for2020now.com) is a turnkey teleophthalmology service provider. That simply isn’t true, she says. “That is very important for having the best quality examination we can do.” They are also tackling the continuity of care issue. “We print [the results] out so patients can bring it to their primary doctor, and we ask they share their results with us.” Our goal is to develop a mutually beneficial and cohesive relationship with doctors to provide care for patients while increasing their bottom line.”

Teleophthalmology has advantages for the patient. Some are obvious: use in philanthropic and mobile care units, rural areas where doctors are scarce and thriving practices in need of an additional OD. It’s also cost effective, especially for those who lack insurance. Another distinct advantage is the increased availability of appointment times when a patient on the East Coast can consult with a doctor on the West Coast after work. What’s more, despite doctors’ resistance, it is what patients want.

20/20NOW shared that 64 percent of Americans said they would attend a appointment via video telehealth, according to an American Well2015 Telehealth Survey and the field is positioned to explode by 2018 with an anticipated 7 million users, up from 350,000 in 2013, according to an IHS Technology report.
Blockchain is a bonafide trend. "The ability to analyze data; like detecting ADHD or pain levels, as well as drowsiness; like reading brainwaves can be the iceberg. According to Brandt, it could make third parties unnecessary. "The independent can lead in this area. We have the technology now to give your business a competitive edge."

SMITH LOWDOWN FOCUS • THORSTON BRANDT

Y ou’re getting ready. There’s a frame for that. Eyewear is the original "wearable" tech. So says Thorston Brandt, general manager of Safilo’s sports and outdoor lifestyle brands in- cluding Smith. The company started looking into wearables in 2015 believing the technology is a horrid trend. They wanted in but didn’t think about getting a smartphone or Fitbit on a person’s face was practical. "We wanted to find technology that was unique and, above all, useful to the customer," Brandt recalls.

Enter the Smith Lowdown Focuspowered by Interacor’s Mucin brain-sensing technol- ogy. "The ability to analyze brainwaves, interpret them and make them useful is really interesting. So, we thought let’s take this idea of medi- tating and put it into some stunning eyewear," explains Brandt.

Brandt believes what they’ve tapped into is a macro trend, given the scale of in- terest in meditation. "We’re all overwhelmed. We never shut down, but we need tech to help us through the stress of our products as well as the over- whelmedness of the world around us. Some familiar names like My EYE Doc, EyeCare Partners (owners of Clarkston Eyecare, EyaCare Associates and Eye- care centers), H.I.G. Private Equity (Barnet Dulaney Perkins, Southwestern EYE Center and TLC Vision), Total EyeCare Associates and Eye- care consultants,” she says. The HIPPA Journal

THE CHAIN GANG

PRIVATE EQUITY

EQUITY, PRIVATE EQUITY

ANNE KAVANAGH • KAVANAGH CONSULTING

PRIVATE EQUITY has had a lot of influence in shaping the current state of retail con- solidation that concerns many ECPs. So, what is it? What does it mean? And why should you care? All good questions. Thankfully, "the independent can remain independent and have multiple opportunities to get support from resources like buying groups or alliances. But for every OD that wants to sell, the more buyers the bet- ter. The more private equity people that enter the space, the more they can monetize their business."

THE CHAIN GANG

Blockchain in Eyecare

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THE CHAIN GAN
Kay, grab a seat if you need to. But we need to talk about Opternative, the provider of online “eye exams.” For better or worse, this technology is already shaking up the industry. Opternative is growing fast and is now approved in 37 states. As Gary Gerber OD, host of the “Power Hour” optometry podcast, pointed out in a recent episode, online refraction is the latest in a long line of technologies heralded — prematurely, it turned out — as the death of optometry. He went on to make the point that the underlying concept itself is not something ECPs should avoid but to increase your access to your own patients.

Opternative says ECPs already stand to benefit from embracing its technology, saying its goal is not to put you or your doc out of business but to increase your access to your own patients. Founder and Chief Scientific Officer Steven Lee, OD, told INVISION, “Managing both the in-person and online correspondence of patients allows the practitioner to be involved in all aspects of patient care.”

The company insists it is not out to disrupt the patient-provider relationship. Nonetheless, Lee adds, “We also know that consumers are looking for the quickest and most economical alternative options. We ... are working diligently with the medical community to integrate our technology in optometry and ophthalmology practices across the U.S. We want the patient’s preferred provider to participate to maintain that relationship.”

Ultimately, you’ll make your own assessment of Opternative as a service. But listening to Lee discuss the origin of his idea should make it clear that there is something inevitable about patients exploring ways of using smartphones to test their vision. The idea came from an interaction Lee had with a patient during an exam. This single, working mother had to take time off work and pay for childcare to check her prescription. After a number of missed appointments, she finally made it into the office. “When she sat down in the exam chair,” Lee said, the patient asked him, “‘Why can’t we just do this at home?’”

Eventually you’ll have to decide whether you’ll be on that patient’s radar — and smartphone — screen.

In the new Safilo collection, design is one with ergonomics and elegance. Every element is conceived to serve both form and function, aesthetics and comfort. Our new exclusive titanium hinge — with its double spring mechanism — can withstand 15 years of impeccable performance. Every single frame exhibits the excellence of Made in Italy eyewear manufacturing, a tradition we treasure as specialists in unparalleled Italian optical design and craftsmanship.
I at first you don’t succeed, try, try again. That’s what Wes Stoody, founder and CEO of Article One and his team — Maggie Stoody Vocos, Cole Sanseverino and Jennifer Wenzlick — did in 2015 when they rebranded their three-year-old A-frames into Article One. They learned a lot about what was right and wrong about the brand but also that the optical industry is in flux. “We learned what was hard and what was great about independent optical and eyewear, so we decided to start from scratch, move production to Italy and focus on...strengthening independent optical and offering the high-end quality and design at an accessible price point.” They also want to get Millennials back into stores. “We know the value ECPs bring to the consumer.” It’s this same understanding of the challenges independent retailers face that led them to beta launch AOLab, a program that allows retailers to “rent” a display kit while Article One manages the details. Stoody explains, “For a small retailer, buying 40 pieces is a huge chunk of change. It affects cash flow and makes it hard for us to get another order.” AOLab provides the retailer with 30 static pieces for the board. When a patient buys a frame, Article One fulfills it directly from their inventory and lab with a four-day turnaround. The program aims to provide retailers with better cash flow, faster fulfillment, and competitive pricing while keeping the frame on the board. “We’re stealing from the playbook of direct to consumer to create some of the same efficiencies,” Stoody says. Going forward, as they expand the AOLab program, it increases the opportunity to capture more consumer data and add additional services to continue that vision of stealing from the direct to consumer model and bringing it to brick and mortar.

Want more ideas? These five books are guaranteed to inspire a few revolutionary ideas of your own.

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**Purple Cow**/**Free Prize Inside** by Seth Godin

Read these two books for an inspirational template for becoming truly unusual.

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**22 Immutable Rules of Branding** by Al and Laura Ries

Whip your brand into shape with these rules for standing out.

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**Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX, and the Quest for a Fantastic Future** by Ashlee Vance

Get inspired by reading about the planet’s current answer to out-of-the-box thinking.

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**The Way We’re Working Isn’t Working** by Tony Schwartz

Your biggest, most important asset? Your energy. Here’s an inspirational guide to getting the most from yourself.

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**First Break All the Rules** by Marcus Buckingham

Learn a different way for hiring (and cultivating) superstar team members.