

Strain, Strain Go Away

DAVID ROGER

THE CHAIN GANG  
BLOCKCHAIN IN EYECARE

EQUITY, PRIVATE EQUITY

CHRIS BENEDICT

ANNE KAVANAGH

# THE FUTURE IS NOW

THE BIG STORY



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TRENDS

THE PEOPLE, TRENDS AND TECHNOLOGIES THAT ARE  
REVOLUTIONIZING THE OPTICAL BUSINESS

In 1998,

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.



## STRAIN, STRAIN GO AWAY

FELIX GRAY ▶ DAVID ROGER AND CHRIS BENEDICT

**A**t INVISION we've written so much on digital eye strain, our eyes hurt. We wrote about it for a reason: According to the Vision Council, more than 60 percent of Americans report symptoms. The profession is woke to both the dangers and the opportunities but it took two securities analysts, David Roger and Chris Benedict, to realize those requiring vision correction aren't the only ones who need help. In 2015, they quit rubbing their eyes and founded Felix Gray, manufacturer and online purveyor of "computer glasses."

Roger and Benedict saw, based on digital device usage, virtually everyone needs blue-light protection. "Chris and I were both working long hours and found ourselves constantly in front of screens," Roger says. "It's common to pull

eight-plus-hour days and find yourself fatigued, having headaches, and other negative effects of digital eye strain. We recognized a need."

Until recently computer glasses meant amber lenses inside frames a welder would be proud of. Felix Gray offers clear lenses with integrated blue-light filtration, as opposed to a coating, housed in frames that, aesthetically, rival those from designer brands. "We developed a proprietary lens that filters blue light via absorption. We embedded a naturally occurring blue light filtering pigment into our lens material so that it remains both clear and effective." The glasses start at \$95, ship in three to five days and are sold through Felix Gray's website in non-magnification and as readers of

varying strengths. Felix Gray's success (triple digit quarter over quarter growth) shows what a tweak to existing technology and cutting edge distribution can do. "The eyewear business has made some phenomenal changes when it comes to distribution, which is providing insane and revolutionary value to customers." He credits the firm's success to its "focus on creating a few timeless products and doing it really well."

You may think there's nothing for you to see here. But consider that Felix Gray's clients are requesting prescription eyewear and they plan to oblige this year. There's no reason an enterprising optical selling private label couldn't do something similar.

## SAY THIS, NOT THAT

Words matter and it's always a challenge striking a balance between sounding like an expert and being a jargon bore.

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 Dovie of Blacksburg Eye Associates in Blacksburg, VA, agrees. "We've been working on 'vision insurance' and 'allowable.' 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 Smoke of Smoke Vision Care in Buchanan, MI.

Our last easy switch up, thanks to INVISION columnist Robert Bell, isn't just in the words you use but the way you think. Don't upsell ... down-sell! "Upselling could be the most foolish approach to sales ever. If you start with the basics and upsell, or add on, add on, add on ... 'what your customers hear is: 'cha-ching, cha-ching, cha-ching,'" says Bell. "Upselling is the ultimate bait-and-switch." Instead, start with the very best products you have to offer, then start down-selling. "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.



## BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME

**N**icolas 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... So many [stores] are boring, so when you go a different way, people remember it. You stand out." But, he says, it doesn't have to be a massive change. "One day display by color—create a rainbow—instead of by brand or gender. If it doesn't work, change it. It's all about the experience." And he doesn't think it has to be expensive to be great; he shared the materials for each booth are the least expensive part. "It's more about thinking outside the box. To survive, you must be willing to change. It's the future to create an experience that brings people back."

# Let's Compare.



Think all labs are the same?

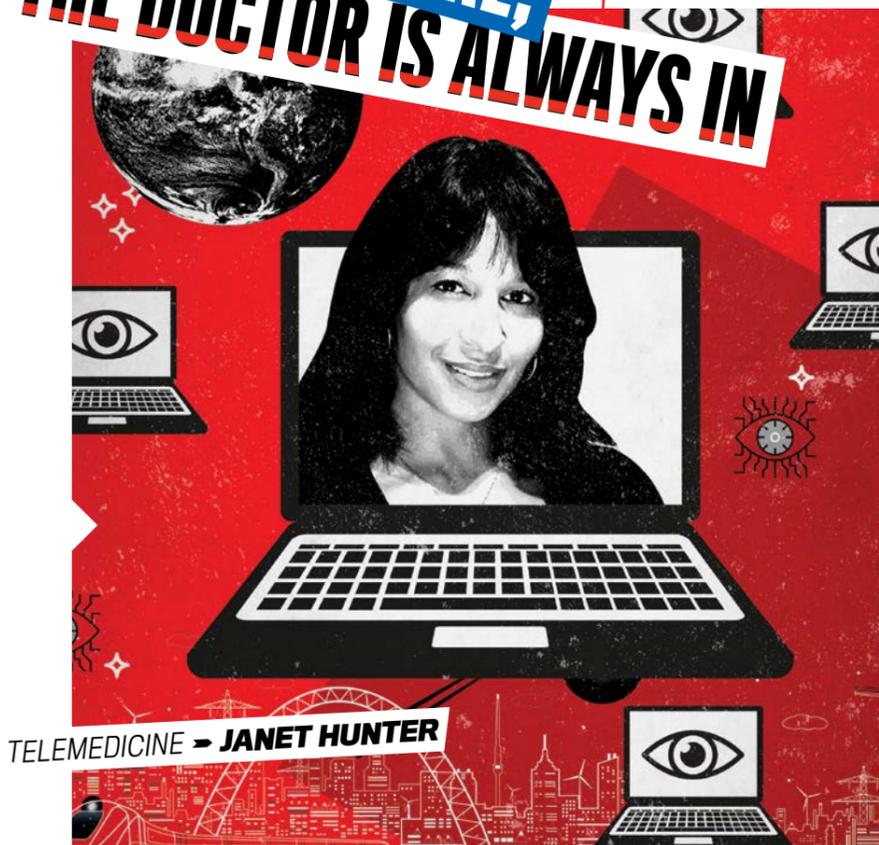
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# IN THE FUTURE, THE DOCTOR IS ALWAYS IN



TELEMEDICINE - JANET HUNTER

**M**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

(for2020now.com), 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 an appointment via video telehealth, according to an American Well 2015 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.



## THE PRACTICE OF THE FUTURE

TEXAS STATE OPTICAL ▶  
**JOHN MARVIN**

**J**ohn 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.



# STEVE MADDEN

Distributed by CLEARVISION | 800.645.3733 | cvoptical.com | Frames Shown: Kriista, Daapper | SECO Booth #1005

SMITH LOWDOWN FOCUS ▶ THORSTON BRANDT



# BRAINWAVES, WEARABLES AND BETTER LIVING THRU SCIENCE

**Y**ou're getting sleepy... 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 including *Smith*. The company started looking into wearables in 2015 believing the technology is a bonafide trend. They wanted in but didn't think putting a smartphone or Fitbit on a person's face was practical. "We wanted to find technology that was unique and...useful to the customer," Brandt recalls.

Enter the *Smith Lowdown Focus* powered by Interaxon's

Muse brain-sensing technology. "The ability to analyze brainwaves, interpret them and make them useful is really interesting. So, we thought let's take this idea of meditating and focus and put it into some stunning eyewear," explains Brandt.

Brandt believes what they've tapped into is a macro trend, given the scale of interest in meditation. "We're all overwhelmed. We never shut down, but now thanks to technology we can overcome it," he suggests. One of the problems with meditation is you don't know if it's working.

Lowdown Focus takes away the guesswork and provides real time feedback on whether what you are doing is effective and the ability to monitor your progress over time.

That is just the tip of the iceberg. According to Brandt, reading brainwaves can be used for a number of applications; like detecting ADHD or pain levels, as well as drowsiness. Brainwaves can tell you if you're about to fall asleep at the wheel, so it has real life applications for driving. Just the things Safilo can see using this technology for across their brands in the future.

## THE CHAIN GANG

BLOCKCHAIN IN EYECARE

**A**nd you were just getting used to your EHR software. The disruptor tech of the moment is blockchain, the decentralized digital ledger that underlies Bitcoin. ECPs may be surprised to learn that healthcare organizations, not the financial industry, are the real pioneers here. If you prescribe or dispense eyewear, this will affect your business soon, especially relating to protected healthcare information.

Blockchain-based services are akin to server apps, but whereas Dropbox is about sharing and storing information, blockchain is about processes — particularly those that have relied upon trusted third parties like banks or health organizations. Blockchain ledgers aren't hackable like servers are, so it could make third parties unnecessary.

According to the IBM Institute for Business Value, healthcare trailblazers "expect the greatest blockchain benefits... in three areas: clinical trial records, regulatory compliance, and medical/health records." According to tech blogger Corey Pauley, blockchain projects will solve "problems [like] how do we empower patients to be the true owner of their medical data?"

What does this mean for how your business handles protected health information? Blockchain would enable the creation of complete, secure, permanent and always accessible medical records available to patients and practices without having to be pieced together. According to *The HIPPA Journal*, "rather than multiple healthcare providers storing...copies of a patient's data, the patient would grant each access and provide them with a key." With Bitcoin, blockchain is used for transactions. With health records, "the transactions would be consultations with physicians...test results, prescriptions, or surgical procedures. Each time data is added, it would need to be validated by a trusted entity who's been given an access key. Once validated, it would be added as a block in the chain...with the blockchain comprising a patient's entire medical history."

There are still many questions about how blockchain will be applied to PHI, but arming yourself with information on this technology now will give your business a head start.

## SHAKE UP YOUR OFFICE



Don't think outside the box... Change what's in it.

▶ **SELL BY AESTHETIC.** Black Optical owner Gary Black isn't the sort to drop (brand) names. A beautiful frame sells itself. "Designers come and go; they have great collections and not-so-great collections... We want our clients to buy into Black Optical, not the designers."

▶ **DITCH THE DESK.** Entering Invision Optometry, you're not processed by an overworked desk jockey; you're welcomed aboard by a smiling concierge offering great coffee. "Everything bad that has ever happened in our office has happened at the front desk, so we just eliminated it," says owner Dr. Michael A. Kling.

▶ **OPEN A STORE IN YOUR STORE.** At Discerning Eye, Joni Schrup wanted to cater to the students who were heading online with their prescriptions, without upending her core mission of quality service and independent labels. The answer was FOCUS, her own store-in-store outlet. "It took years...to find vendors with eyewear that met our standards with prices that are affordable for all." Now she's got the best of both worlds.



▶ **INSTANT EYEWEAR WARDROBE.** Your patients come to you for quality eyewear and care. You

appreciate that. You'd also appreciate it if they bought more stuff. EyeStyles Optical and Boutique owner Nikki Griffin negotiated pricing for three-pair sales with her lab. The result: LifeStyle Packages. Three single-vision lenses start at \$499; progressives are \$899. "I wanted to disabuse people of the notion that you have to sacrifice service and quality for price."

▶ **'DOMO ARIGATO, MR....'** Here's a memo from the future from Japan-based JINS' San Francisco optical. Thanks to "Anna," the lens-edging robot, patients can come in for an exam, and 30 minutes after it's complete, walk out with their glasses.

## EQUITY, PRIVATE EQUITY

ANNE KAVANAGH ▶ KAVANAGH CONSULTING

**P**ivate equity has had a lot of influence in shaping the current state of retail consolidation that concerns many ECPs. So, what is it? What does it mean for the independent ECP? And why should you care? All good questions. Thankfully, we were able to tap Anne Kavanagh of Kavanagh Consulting, who represents the selling side (ie. independent optometrists) find the best exit strategy when they're ready to hand over the reins, to answer them.

First off, Kavanagh explains that "private equity" is an investment class, like stocks, bonds, mutual funds or hedge funds. Some of the reasons private equity investment in the optical market has gotten so hot is because the industry as a whole is very fragmented, according to Kavanagh, while owner ODs are also "facing higher administrative and operational burdens triggered by increasing government, regulatory, payor and supplier demands." Meaning optometrists went to school to become doctors and now also have to be experts in retail and managed care. "Business has become too difficult and they feel like they can't be a good doctor and a great merchandiser of product and an expert in managed care," she says.

Also, "younger ODs, who have traditionally stepped into the ownership role of retiring owners, are graduating with higher levels of student debt and an increased desire for work-life balance," explains Kavanagh. So, Mil-

lennials aren't just not buying cars or houses ... they aren't buying optometry practices either.

There are a couple of major players already in the sandbox, but Kavanagh shares the field is widening. Some familiar names like My Eye Doc, EyeCare Partners (owners of Clarkson Eyecare, EyeCare Associates and Eye-carecenter), H.I.G. Private Equity (Barnet Dulane Perkins, Southwestern Eye Center and TLC Vision), Total Eyecare Partners (Gaddie Eye Centers), are being joined by upstarts like Bregal Sagmount focused on California

and FYidocors out of Canada.

Each look for a specific sort of business when valuating acquisitions; some want a heavy retail focus, others have a more medical or ophthalmology bent. But Kavanagh assures that independents not interested in selling are safe. "The independent can remain independent and has multiple opportunities to get support from resources like buying groups or alliances. But for every OD that wants to sell, the more buyers the better. The more private equity people that enter the space, the more they can monetize their business."



## PUT YOUR NAME ON IT

SHO EYEWORKS  
▶ RACHEL AYARS

In theory, private label offers differentiation. In practice, problems with minimums, warranties and logistics can make it a headache. Delivering on the concept's promise fell to SHO Eyeworks. Founded in 2011, it has since emerged at the vanguard of private label. SHO offers the connections and technology you get from big players, but with fewer strings attached. It aims to work with, not squeeze, independent ECPs. And its enemies are yours — defined by marketing director Rachel Ayars as “the big box store, insurance discounts, and online sales.” She adds, “Every account we work with sells our product under a different name, [so] our success is directly linked to theirs.”

Kevin Kim and Edward Choy, managing director and sales director, brought 17 years of experience with foreign manufacturers and North American ECPs to the table. Ayars, a licensed optician, joined in 2013 from a practice in Cambridge, MA that was losing customers online. “I saw the potential and knew first-hand how much ECPs needed it.”

SHO's Private Label helps ECPs take the guesswork and risk out of curating their own brands. With over 500 SKUs, they add new styles four times a year, which can be custom engraved at no extra cost or turnaround time, with no high minimums. This year the firm will move beyond eyewear with a bespoke marketing service. “It's not enough to just throw frames on their board. We want to help them develop and sell their brand.”

SHO's own success comes down to its tight focus. “In some ways, we have put blinders on, trying to ignore what's been done in the rest of the industry and make something new,” Ayars says. Spoken like a true revolutionary.



OPTERNATIVE ▶  
STEVEN LEE, OD

## ON A PATIENT'S (RADAR) SCREEN

**O**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 — or can afford to — ignore.

Opternative says ECPs already stand to benefit from embracing its technology, saying its goal is not to put you or your doc out of busi-

ness 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.

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safilo.com

# STEALING FROM THE ONLINE PLAYBOOK

ARTICLE ONE ▶ WES STOODY

If 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 brand 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 highest quality and design at an accessible price point." They also wanted 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 big 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.



## REVOLUTIONARY READING

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



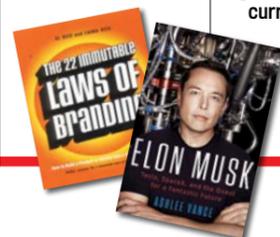
**Purple Cow/Free Prize Inside**  
by Seth Godin

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

### 22 Immutable Rules of Branding

by Al and Laura Ries

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



### Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX, and the Quest for a Fantastic Future

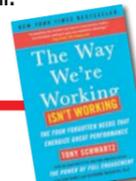
Get inspired by reading about the planet's current exemplar of out-of-the-box thinking.



### 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.



### First Break All the Rules

by Marcus Buckingham

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



You are Invited