

# 10 Proven Strategies for Selling Sunwear

*Selling sunwear to your patients can be a rewarding experience. Here's how.*

**By Debra R. White, MEd, ABOM, FCLSA**

I love sunwear, and I have several pair to choose from depending on what my outdoor plans are. I'm sure you do too. But what about your patients? Do they own several pair? Are you doing a really good job when it comes to presenting and selling sunwear to them? Try these proven strategies for selling sunwear and watch your multiple pair sunwear sales climb.

## Wear It Yourself

There are two very important reasons for wearing sunwear yourself. First, you want to be seen wearing sunglasses as you make your way around your community. Why? You're an eyecare professional (ECP) and everyone who knows you expects you to wear the latest eye-wear as well as what is essential for outdoor use. The worst thing you can do is wear clear glasses or no eyeglasses at all outdoors. This tells people that sunwear is not really important. Why? Because if you're not wearing it, and you're the expert, it really isn't essential.

The second reason has to do with experience. To really understand the features and benefits a particular type of sunwear has, you need to wear it. After all, you are a trusted ECP and your patients value your advice. What could be better than speaking about the virtues of sunwear from personal experience?

## Create sunwear of all kinds and try them to discover what really works.

Does this mean that you should get one pair of dark tinted lenses in a frame and wear them? No, but that's a good start. To be authoritative about sunwear, you need to try as many options as you can so that you understand and appreciate all the recommendations you make. This will probably necessitate your having several pair of sunwear. One pair might have dark gray lenses while another has a mirror coating and a third might have a photochromic pair. All of them might also have an anti-reflective treatment on them.

You'll also want to experiment with different types of frames. For example, you'll want to find a frame that's well suited for aggressive sports like



(Photo courtesy of Wiley X.)

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### Course Description:

The concept that everyone needs sunwear is beginning to find acceptance among eyecare professionals. After decades of looking at sunwear as a luxury or novelty item, sunwear's medical necessity and fashion benefits are emerging as solid reasons for everyone to own a pair. But if you want every patient to own a pair then you'll need to sell one to every patient. This course presents 10 established methods that you can use to accomplish this goal.

tennis, and perhaps another one that works well for motorcycle riders. In addition, it would be good to have one that's super sporty for casual wear.

The important thing here is not the specific examples I'm providing but the concept—create sunwear of all kinds and try them to discover what really works. As you do, you'll discover the key points to share with your patients about the merits of these products. Because of your personal experiences, you will be able to say without reservation that you personally recommend XYZ sunwear because you have a pair and you love them. That's pretty powerful ammunition at the dispensing table.

## Explain Its Medical Necessity and Benefits

Sunwear does more than just look great outdoors, it actually has a medically protective aspect to it. The majority of ultra-violet (UV) exposure to the eye occurs before age 18. This means that young people are particularly susceptible to it but all people need protection from it.

Long-term exposure and accumulation of UV radiation to the eye have damaging effects on the conjunctiva (as a pinguecula), the cornea (as a pterygium), the crystalline lens (as a cataract), and retina (as macular degeneration). Recent studies indicate that blue light wavelengths can be hazardous in a similar way to UV radiations.

If you want to provide the best service for your patients, you need to explain the medical necessity of sunwear to them as well as the solutions to the problem. Emphasize that most parents slather sunscreen all over their kids when they go outdoors to play, yet many are unaware how harmful UV can be to the eye and its components. Explain how UV's effects build up over the years so the best course of action is to get protected early. Explain to parents that their children are particularly at risk because of the heavier absorption in their early years, so getting UV protection at a young age makes good medical sense.

The easiest way to manage UV exposure is to supply lenses that absorb it. Fortunately, just about every plastic lens material on the market absorbs UV, including polycarbonate, Trivex™, and high index lenses. While CR-39® absorbs only about half of the UV spectrum, you can add a UV dye or coating which will absorb the rest of it. Glass lenses have lit-

tle UV absorption so if you use them, you'll need to add a UV-absorbing coating to obtain UV protection. Be sure to consult the spectral chart for any colored lenses you sell so you'll know their UV and blue light-absorbing properties.

## Offer It to Every Patient

Just about everyone goes out in the sun at some point in the day. Some people spend more time outdoors than others. No matter what their lifestyle may be, when they venture out into the sun, their clear lenses just do not provide the glare protection they need. When you think about it, it becomes obvious that every patient needs sunwear.

In order to ensure that every patient gets sunwear, you need to offer it to all your patients. Think of it as their other first pair of eyeglasses—one clear pair for indoors and one tinted pair for outdoors. In some cases, the patient will need more than one pair of outdoor eyewear (see "Make Sunwear Task-Specific," page 67).

Even if a patient emerges from the exam room without a prescription, be sure to recommend sunwear. Remember, sunwear is for everyone, not just those who receive a prescription. Letting emmetropic patients out of the office without recommending sunwear is not good ophthalmic practice...and it's not good business either.

Don't forget your contact lens patients, and those

(Photo courtesy of Kaenon Polarized.)

who may have had refractive surgery.

While these patients have chosen to eliminate their everyday eyewear, they still need sunwear and in many cases are eager to get it because the lenses are plano so their eyewear choices are no longer limited by their prescription.

## Bundle Sunwear with Clear Pairs

A great way to get your patients to buy sunwear is through bundling. After selling the clear pair, have them try on a few sunwear styles. Offer them a discount on the sun pair if they purchase them with the clear pair. You might also offer them a slightly lower discount if they buy them within a certain time frame, say 30 days.

Bundling is an effective strategy used by most mass retailers. You encounter it every time you ask for the #4 meal at McDonald's or Taco



Bell, for example. If it works for those guys, it will work for you.

Consider creating a number of bundled packages. The best one has all the whistles while the middle and basic versions have fewer options. All the buyer has to say it, "Give me No. 3," and the deal is done.

Bundling works because it offers more features for less money to buyers. In many cases, they will buy more features than they originally intended because the deal they are getting is so good and they don't want to pass up the value of the bundled package.

It also works because it makes the buying decision less confusing. The buyer simply has to select the bundled package she wants and ask for it rather than asking for one feature, then another, then another, then another, and so on. Convenience and simplicity are important elements in selling any kind of eyewear, especially sunwear where there are more options to discuss than with clear eyewear.

## Sell Recognizable Brands

Recommending branded eyewear products is one of the strongest tools an ECP has in selling sunwear these days. That is because branding is powerful.

Branding is a label that identifies the quality and lifestyle that can be expected for a given product. Consumers who identify with that brand are often strongly loyal to it. It's as if the product had an unwritten guarantee promising consistent quality that buyers have come to expect.

Eyewear manufacturers know the power of branding and align their designs with the brand's image. Brands that cannot deliver consistent results run the risk of losing the buyer. For brands that have product extensions like clothes, accessories, furniture, etc., this can be a really costly loss.

People buy brands they feel portray who they are (or want to be). They feel comfortable wearing their brand and enjoy the feelings they experience when they use it. They also know that people who notice them in their branded products immediately conjure up a certain image of that person. In other words, the brand actually helps the user portray who they are.

People entering the clothing area of large department stores often head directly to the brand names they know and trust. The same is true when it comes to sunwear. There is a brand for just about any lifestyle and image you can imagine—the woman who loves flashy jewelry and clothes, the man who spends weekends on his boat, the inner city youth wearing an overly large basketball jersey, the college athlete wearing branded sneakers and a hat—the list is nearly endless.



(Photo courtesy of Luxottica Group.)

## Demo Your Stuff

Many people can only remember a small percent of what is told to them. Educationally, people have different learning styles: visual (seeing a diagram or video about it); tactile (touching, feeling, or otherwise experiencing the product); and auditory (hearing about the issue). If you are a smart ECP, you will use all three methods to get product information across to your patients.

Demonstrations hit all three of the learning styles. That is because demonstrations use a product sample to illustrate a point so patients get to touch and examine the product. They get to see it so their visual learning sense is satisfied, and your explanation facilitates auditory learning. It is for these reasons that a product demonstration is one of the most powerful communications tools you have. Use as many of them as you can.

I suggest that you have printed material in your office that explains your products too. People will pick up these pieces and read them while they are waiting. They make handy references to points you've made and play right into the learners who love reading about things. Posters and tabletop advertisement pieces are essential to have around your dispensary because they provide and cement ideas visually. And of course, a product demo with a sample product is invaluable.

## Keep Up with Fashion Trends

Few people want to be seen in outdated styles. Fashion changes, as do products and the buying attitudes of consumers. This is particularly true of sunwear which has a significant link to the accessories market.

If you want to sell fashionable eyewear, you have to understand fashion and its impact on eyewear. Fashion is simply a mindset—a concept of

what most people feel is the latest style. It creates fads and trends (short-term and longer-term buying habits, respectively). Since eyewear is a fashion item as well as a prescription medical device, it follows the fads and trends of the general fashion market. That's why it's so important for you to keep up with what's happening in the fashion world and how it relates to eyewear.

Even if you might not be the most fashionable person on earth, you can stay abreast of the latest fashion trends. One good method is to get a subscription to a fashion magazine and read it each month.

Stay in touch with the styles being shown on television. Manufacturers spend millions to let consumers know what their latest offerings are through television. Contemporary movies also are diligent in using the latest fashion trends. In fact, they often help establish fashion trends so be sure to key into this.

Take a stroll through your local department store about once a month. As you do, notice the fashion trends there. Department stores are an excellent place to see what large retailers feel is the latest fashion for a wide variety of products.

Frame reps will be happy to show you their latest collections and explain the most current fads and trends. Seek out the advice of these people—in most cases they know what they're talking about and can be very helpful.

Visiting optical trade shows will keep you right up there with all of the optical fashion divas, especially if you attend a large national or international conference. This is where manufacturers pull out all the stops to

### Getting the Message Across

As a professional who understands the benefits of polarized sun lenses, how do you educate your patients so they understand the benefits as well? Think about the age-old saying, "A picture paints a thousand words." Telling your patients that a new pair of polarized lenses will reduce plane polarized glare probably won't help and going into a complicated explanation using the "Venetian blinds" analogy is most likely more than they need to know.

Just about every polarized lens manufacturer, both plano and prescription, has a demonstrator available to eyecare professionals at little or no charge. Having at least one of them in your dispensary is invaluable. Most demonstrators typically have a picture that shows surface reflections. Use it to explain how glare interferes with clear vision and causes visual discomfort.

The demonstrator kit may have a single polarized lens supplied. Let the patient place the lens in front of his eye and turn it until he receives the full visual effect. You'll be amazed at the positive reaction.

Some kits come with two lorgnettes—one with fixed tint lenses, the other with polarized lenses. Have patients switch between the two lorgnettes to see the difference between tinted lenses and polarized lenses. Once they experience the difference, the additional cost of the polarized option becomes moot because they want the benefits polarized lenses provide.



(Photo courtesy of Panoptix.)

show ECPs what the latest fashions are. And of course, read optical magazines every month. The writers will help you learn what's hot and the ads will tell you what's new.

Part of staying abreast of fashion trends is keeping an eye on what celebrities are wearing. This crowd loves to sport sunwear so keeping an eye on who's wearing what among the beautiful people is smart.

Watch the award nights on television and read optical trade journals to see what styles the celebs have been "caught" wearing each month. Take a peek at the tabloids and subscribe to magazines like *People* too. If you're staying in tune with what's hot in sunwear, you'll be able to identify many of the styles the celebs are wearing. Stock the sunwear that celebs are wearing. After all, they are helping to make sunwear a "must-have" item.

Sunwear worn by celebrities in movies, on TV, and around town provides you with an opportunity for some mighty powerful sound bites. For example, you might say to a potential buyer, "Did you know that the actor Will Smith wears these sunglasses?" Think of how powerful a statement like that is. Or, "Incidentally, these XYZ sunglasses were worn by Clint Eastwood at the Academy Awards." A sound bite like this is really going to get noticed and give the product a whole new appeal to the buyer.

Use posters of celebs wearing sunwear in your office too. After all, who wouldn't want to look like that famous woman or man? Your patients will notice and want to wear what they are wearing too.

**Some sunwear sellers recommend the sunwear to their patients first because they know they'll be on board for the clear pair later on.**

### Make Sunwear Task-Specific

Some patients and ECPs are under the impression that one pair of sunwear will be fine for all outdoor activities. The truth is that sunwear, just like clear eyeglasses, can be made for specific tasks. When they are, they enhance the wearer's vision for that activity and deliver the maximum in visual comfort and performance. This is why you need to become a detective of sorts and find out how your patients use their eyes outdoors.

If they golf, offer them high contrast amber or green sun lenses that enhance perception on the fairways. Suggest mirror-coated polarized sun lenses to cut glare and reduce the intensity of the sun to boaters and other water enthusiasts. Cyclists will love red-colored photochromic lenses that increase contrast and adjust to varying light conditions. If your patient drives a great deal, there are now polarized photochromic sun lenses that adjust to varying light conditions behind the windshield.

Patients who find themselves in full sun, high glare conditions, such as mountain climbers, will wonder how they ever managed without dark brown or gray lenses with polarization. Skiers encountering bright sun overhead and reflections from the snow below will welcome double-gradient mirrors for eliminating unwanted glare from above and below.

How about a gradient blue mirror treatment for the hiker? The mirror treatment on top of the lens eliminates glare from above while the reduction of mirror in the bottom enables viewing the trail. Those finding themselves in rainy conditions such as sports spectators, runners, or park rangers, for example, will enjoy increased contrast with yellow- or

orange-colored lenses.

It's not just the lenses that make sunwear task-specific. Sunwear frames for active types should have design features to keep the frame sitting comfortably on the head. These include features such as comfortable, grippable nose pads and temple ends, and rugged frame materials. Active people want sunwear that protects against dust, dirt, and grit. Fog resistance is also a helpful feature. Sunwear that wraps around the face provides full coverage and venting is the perfect solution for fogging.

Design the sunwear around the activity. Not only will this make the sunwear perfect for what your patients enjoy doing, it also opens the door to multiple pair sunwear sales.

### Recommend Multifocal Sunwear

There's nothing more frustrating for a presbyope who needs to read something (like a map) with distance-only sunwear on. Piggybacking readers over sunwear not only looks dorky, it pretty much assures that one pair will scratch the other as they each slide around.

Readymade sunwear readers are a good place to begin. There are even readymade sunwear bifocals available. These are ideal for those who have little or no need for a distance prescription; they can be an easy sale if explained to the patient.

Multifocal prescription sunwear should be an easy sell as well. Segmented bifocals are simple to fit, and come at a good price point. Progressive addition lenses are more cosmetic and patients who already wear them will understand their convenience and good looks as sunwear. When showing frames for multifocal sun lenses, be sure to keep in mind sufficient depth in the vertical dimension to allow adequate depth for the multifocal.

### Sell It First

Some successful sunwear sellers begin the eyewear selection process by asking patients if they would like to begin with a clear pair or sunwear pair. Or bolder yet, some recommend the sunwear first, because they know they'll be on board for the clear pair later on.

Some ECPs call sunwear "the other first pair." This is a great concept that you should adopt. While your patient is trying on clear eyewear, place several sunwear pieces in his hands to try on too. It's a real conversation starter.

Selling sunwear can be a lot of fun. Take some of these proven sunwear selling strategies and run with them. Not only will they be fun to do, you'll see your profit potential escalate in a matter of weeks! ■

*Debra R. White is a former opticianry professor. She is currently an optical consultant, lecturer, and writer.*



(Photo courtesy of Oakley, Inc.)

# Sunwear Selling Strategies Continuing Education Self-Assessment Test

Please fill out the Answer Sheet at the end of this test, making sure to blacken every selected answer circle clearly and completely. Respondents with a passing score of 12 or more correct answers will receive one (1) hour of CE credit by the American Board of Opticianry. This test is valid through March 1, 2008.

- Which sales technique assists the patient who is a tactile learner?
  - pamphlets on a table
  - playing an educational video
  - discussing features and benefits
  - showing an interactive lens demo unit
- From which of the following activities does a patient have the most to gain from 8.00D-base curve sun lenses?
  - NASCAR spectator
  - cyclist
  - UPS driver
  - gardener
- Which term describes how eyewear manufacturers align themselves with highly recognizable names, found in designer clothing lines and sporting items?
  - bonusing
  - bundling
  - discounting
  - branding
- Which corneal growth is exacerbated by excessive UV and may cause visual impairment if it is allowed to cross over the pupil?
  - pinguecula
  - pterygium
  - cataract
  - glaucoma
- Which lens material requires additional treatment to make it UV protective?
  - CR-39®
  - Trivex™
  - polycarbonate
  - 1.60 index plastic
- According to the author, which group of patients benefits from sunwear the most?
  - contact lens wearer
  - kid
  - emmetropes
  - refractive surgery patients
- Which sales technique begins with basic packages and progressively adds more lens treatment options at attractive prices?
  - bonusing
  - bundling
  - discounting
  - branding
- Which activity would greatly benefit from a gradient mirror lens treatment?
  - horseback riding
  - snowboarding
  - driving
  - model airplane enthusiast
- Which sunwear recommendation would not be appropriate for your presbyopic patient embarking on a cross-country motor trip?
  - dark gray segmented bifocal
  - polarized PAL
  - plano photogra
  - readymade sunwear readers
- According to the text, which patient is best indicated for orange-colored lenses?
  - lumberjack
  - racecar driver
  - farmer
  - lifeguard
- In addition to UV wavelengths, which color wavelength is now known to cause damage to the eye?
  - blue
  - red
  - green
  - yellow
- Which sales technique will likely help you communicate best when selling fashion sunwear to a patient who always wears the latest style of clothing?
  - describing the technical benefits of polarization
  - stating which celebrity was wearing a particular pair of sunglasses
  - explaining the medical benefits of sunlenses
  - demo-ing your new photochromic lens display
- Which ocular condition may occur when excessive UV is absorbed by the retina over a number of years?
  - cataract
  - macular degeneration
  - glaucoma
  - pterygium
- As a trusted eyecare professional (ECP), what is the worst thing you can do when it comes to selling sunwear?
  - recommend sunwear to all age groups
  - not wear sunwear yourself
  - not be up on the latest fashion trends and fads
  - sell more than one pair of sunglasses to active patients
- To which group should ECPs specifically recommend sunwear to?
  - people who work outdoors
  - children
  - everybody
  - outdoors enthusiasts

## ANSWER SHEET

Fill out and mail this portion to: Sunwear Selling Strategies CE, c/o First Vision Media Group, Inc., 25 East Spring Valley Ave., Suite 290, Maywood, NJ 07607 or FAX to: 201-587-9464. Be sure to fill out form completely. This CE Article is also available on the Web at [totallyoptical.com](http://totallyoptical.com).

## ANSWERS:

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|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. (a) (b) (c) (d) | 6. (a) (b) (c) (d)  | 11. (a) (b) (c) (d) |
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