For Optometric professionals the battle between the online contact lens companies and the eye care professionals who put their time and energy into the most precise fit and comfort for our patients, has become a daily occurrence. Contact lenses do not fit perfectly by accident. It sometimes requires multiple visits, and several trial contact lenses.

It is incredible when our patient seems surprised by our lack of enthusiasm as we hand them their contact lens prescription. How can they not be aware following the multiple measurements, and the extra time we provide that is necessary for a contact lens fitting? Maybe they don’t understand the education that is required, perhaps they assume contact lens fittings are done randomly, we just guess, or some bizarre thoughts are that we choose the most expensive lenses available, because all we think of is the financial aspect of contact lenses.

There are websites that actually state that there is a conspiracy with prescribing physicians and opticians to charge our patients as much as we can. The assumption lost revenue is our driving force when prescribing and dispensing contact lenses.

When our patients purchase their contact lenses online there is lost revenue for sure. But, we understand the loss is more than money when patients’ make the decision to purchase contact lenses outside of the prescribing doctors’ practice. We loose the ability to monitor the effectiveness of the prescribed contact lenses. We are acutely aware our patients’ may potentially wear contact lenses that have not been prescribed for 12 months or longer!

Contact lenses are medical devices; they should never be used without medical supervision. It may be dangerous to eye health. Contacts sold without prescriptions have caused permanent vision damage and potential blindness! It is difficult to understand why a person would risk their vision for any amount of money!

We are not able to know every competitor, there are too many, and not all will play fair. Some will advertise prices for the identical brands of contact lenses we offer; others are sold as “the same as,” and sold for ridiculously low prices are not the same. They are far inferior to the contact lenses we provide. Contact lenses manufactured and sold outside the United States, are not required to be FDA approved. That means there are literally no standards they are required to meet; and are sold to unsuspecting individuals that don’t realize the contact lenses they have purchased may be knock-offs, expired re-used, rejected, or contaminated with micro organisms, that will cause eye infections, some that are serous enough to cause vision loss or permanent blindness.

There are some websites that promote purchasing contact lenses without a prescription. They encourage individuals to enter their glasses prescription without any contact lens information provided by a doctor, in fact they actually have a process that “works around” an expired prescription!
Not every online contact lens company is unscrupulous. Most are legitimate, and want safe contact lens wear. They require verification of a current contact lens prescription. Unfortunately most require our patients to enter the contact lens specification information themselves. Which is an additional chance for transposition of numbers, and to enter wrong prescription information.

Contact lens subscription services are becoming more common. They realize the importance of cost effectiveness, and convenience. They will work with in conjunction with the prescribing physicians, encouraging compliance, together with the prescribing physicians entering the contact lens specifications will almost eliminate the risk for our patient to receive the wrong contact lenses.

Though it is almost impossible to compete with most online contact lens pricing, our responsibility remains the health of our patients’ eyes. That fundamentally requires us to provide every contact lens patient information of the importance compliance with contact lens instructions, and adhering to the specific information given with their contact lens prescription.