



Time to Reconsider In-Office Edging

An in-office finishing lab is more practical than ever for optometric practices. If you don't currently have a lens edging system and other lab equipment, it is time to give it another look. My practice has had a finishing lab for over 30 years and I will share my reasons why I believe it is smart to do this work in house, but the recent policies by VSP and EyeMed that pay the provider for in-office lab work make it more desirable than ever.

Have more control

There are many benefits to in-office edging systems, but a major one for me is keeping more control on the products we dispense. I care very much about service and quality in my practice and I find that the more factors I take care of myself, the better everything is. My staff is able to make a high percentage of lenses in our office and we inspect them and make sure they are perfect. If they are not perfect, we can remake that job very quickly. We can use uncut lenses that have a premium antireflective already applied. We can roll and polish the edges, apply UV protection and tints. We make single vision and multifocal lenses, but even if you limit your work to single vision, edging makes sense.

Improve service

The standard time for eyeglasses to be made has become 10 working days. That is code for two weeks. I try to improve that by working with my lab, but in some cases, especially with some vision plans, there is nothing I can do. That is part of the control I don't like to give up. Many jobs that you can edge in house are done significantly faster; many can be done the same day or next day. Patients love that!

Increase profit

In-office edging reduces your cost of goods in two ways: you eliminate the edging cost on every invoice and you are much more likely to use stock uncuts instead of surfaced lenses. Stock lenses are much less expensive and they come in many formats, such as Transitions, antireflective, scratch resistance in plastic, poly and high index. Compare prices for stock uncuts and add-on features with the usual lab price list and you'll be shocked.

The recent development for vision plans to allow you to make your own lenses and to pay you for them is another way to increase profits with edging. The fees you receive are higher for premium lenses than they are for basic lenses, but it really does add up. Since many practices have a high percentage of their optical orders going through a vision plan, an additional \$10 or \$20 per job is significant.

Staff issues

Many optometrists avoid owning a lab in their office because they are concerned it will take too much staff time. I don't really get that. I want a larger staff and the money saved or generated with a lab easily pays for that. Lab work can often be done during slow times in the office. Many lab technicians serve double duty and also fill the role of dispensing optician. This makes the office very efficient and provides valuable back-up for the existing staff.

Edging systems today are so advanced and so automated, that edging a perfect pair of lenses is quite easy and fast. That makes training your staff also easy. Typically, the equipment sales representative will assist in training your staff; the rep can be a very valuable resource in every step of planning your new lab. Under no circumstances should the doctor do the lab work himself or herself. Delegate it to staff from the very beginning

Do a financial projection

It is best if you gather the facts yourself and project the cost of the equipment and the amount of money you can generate. Call some vendors of edging systems and get a price quote. Assume you want to lease the equipment (which the rep can help you with) and place that monthly payment in the cost column. Also list staff time under costs, but realize you may just use existing staff more efficiently. In the savings column, multiply the average savings per job you can realize by the number of jobs you do per month, looking at both vision plans and private pay. If you come close to breaking even, it is a no-brainer. Buy the edging system! It will pay for itself from day one. And remember that when the equipment is paid off in five years, your profit will increase by that amount.

Best wishes for continued success,

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