

# Opternative Report

When I made the proposal presentation to the OAM Board I wrote "Change is everywhere and Opternative is the beginning of at-home computer based eye test alternatives/apps/programs." I was unsure how the exam would work and if it would/could be an effective system for consumers to obtain a usable Rx for their glasses. I think it's also important to recognize that Opternative is the first of what may be several on-line eye exam options that will be available to the general public in the near (?) future.

The first thing I asked the Team to do was to leave any preconceptions at the door. We were all looking to duplicate as closely as possible the consumer experience along with it's potential challenges and pleasant or unpleasant surprises. We also agreed the it is likely that the person utilizing the on-line exam format will also be likely to purchase their eyewear on-line as well.

With the test group of just 6 individuals we knew from the beginning that this was simply to give the OAM membership some insight into the process and efficacy of the Opternative process. Any findings from such a small sample size and, being opticians with more knowledge and awareness than the average consumer, makes our efforts not a true scientific study. Nonetheless, we adhered to the scientific method as best we could.

Overview:

Opternative sets the following restrictions:

- must be between 18 - 50 years old (**Recently changed from 40 years old**)
- no bifocals or progressive lenses
- sphere power not to exceed -6.00 to +2.50
- cylinder power not to exceed +or-2.50
- health questionnaire to be completed and passed
- your most recent comprehensive eye exam be within the last 2 years
- Opternative makes it clear that theirs is not a replacement for a regular exam since there is no eye health evaluation to it.
- upon completion you must send your current Rx or they offer to contact your doctor for it

Opternative exam requirements:

- Android/Apple cell phone
- monitor (laptop or desktop) to be sized using any credit card. They show a box and you hold up a credit card up to your screen and then shrink or enlarge the box to match the credit card size. This insures the image size results will be proper regardless of the type and size of the monitor used.
- turn off screen saver mode
- increase monitor brightness
- dark room (as dark as possible)
- 12 feet of floor space
- 25 minutes
- the distance to stand from the screen was determined by entering your shoe size. You are asked to remove your shoes and they provide you with the proper numbers of steps to mark off and stand.

An ophthalmologist will then evaluate the results and send an Rx.

Each individual on the team had a different type of RX requirement- 1 with hyperopia, 1 with mild myopia (-1.00 range), 2 with medium myopia (-3.50 w/cyl range), 1 only wears rest lens at the computer, 1 has Rx need for only 1 eye.

## **Thoughts:**

The Opternative exam is well thought out and the results were relatively close to the current wearing Rx. Keep in mind that at the end of the testing Opternative requests/requires that you forward your current Rx before they send the results of their exam. The exam is taken without glasses and with no knowledge of your current Rx.

They seem to eliminate many potential issues by limiting the age range/Rx range and through their screening health questions.

The issue many of us think about is the eye health aspect. They do make it clear that Opternative is not a replacement for a regular eye exam. You need to confirm that you've had a complete eye exam within 2 years. The worry is the possibility of the consumer not being honest and using this on-line visual evaluation as a replacement. As we know, most people go to the eye doctor for a new Rx evaluation...many feel their eye health is fine and dismiss it's importance. Of course there is room for abuse as there is with anything. Some States (OD associations) have lobbied for and received legislative restrictions of the use of Opternative for public health reasons.

We were not out to trick Opternative or be unfair in the selection of the Team members. At the time, one of the Team members was slightly beyond the age limit. I knowingly encouraged this person to misrepresent the date of birth in order to test the limits of Opternative and whether or not an average consumer would be able to misrepresent during the process. This person currently wears SV lenses only and has no need of any near point Rx so we thought it would be an interesting exercise. Each team member also had a quick refraction with an OD within 24 hours of the Opternative exam in order to compare Rx's.

You need to have both a computer and an Android or Apple cell phone. This might eliminate a few people but not many within their target market. The test is not quick and the word "grueling" was used by one and implied by another...although the other team members felt it was easy. Yet, its time and detail gave an impression of thoroughness to several team members as opposed to a common complaint we all hear from patients of how quick and rushed they felt in a Doctor's office exam. Food for thought.

The Team member older than allowed was told that there were inconsistencies in their exam and therefore they were not able to give an Rx...and Opternative also refunded the \$40 exam fee. We give them credit for this. This person called Opternative and spoke to a customer service person asking what the inconsistencies were and offered to take the exam again but was told that it wouldn't change. Another team member was asked to take the exam again by Opternative which they did and they received an Rx after the 2nd take. The others received their Rx within 24 hours.

In February 2016 Opternative announced that they received \$6 million to expand it's on-line exam. Also in February a new startup company won a healthcare contest for a new smartphone app that provides "...a complete and accurate measurement for the refractive error of the eye for eyeglasses and contact lenses prescriptions." These on-line exams will likely not go away. Although they will not appeal to everyone there will be a portion of the market that will be interested and that will grow as technology improves.

This not necessarily the fight for opticians but it's truly a reminder of how quickly things are changing. This is a battle for OD's and MD's yet the natural extension of an on-line exam is the purchase of glasses on-line which will get more discussion in Part 2 of this report. In fact, Opternative seems to have a 'relationship' with Made Eyewear with Made giving 20% off with an Opternative Rx.