



## SPRING TRAINING

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No, not THAT spring training. We'll talk about that later. In the mean time, check your calendars and what's hanging from magnets on the 'fridge. Showers for babies and weddings, graduations, wedding invitations, vacations, spring break...need I continue? This flurry of creative paperwork should trigger a couple of ideas for your practice.

- ✓ **Spring break**, for the college set usually happens in March and involves warm, sunny locations and some other stuff we don't need to talk about here. However, it should trigger a discussion about contact lenses, back-up eyeglasses and extremely cool sunglasses. Depending on your demographics, extremely cool and expensive don't have to go hand in hand. Chances are good that the contact lenses and sunglasses will float out to sea before the end of the week, so perhaps the backup eyeglasses should have a pair of variable tint lenses, now available in a variety of colors beyond grey and brown. **Spring break** for the family usually centers on the Easter holidays and can involve the last trip to the slopes or the first trip to the shore. Either location involves sunlight and plenty of it. Remind your patients that visual health doesn't have a "season" and that protective eyewear, be it sunglasses, ski goggles or swim specs, are a must for every family member. Don't let them make the mistake I made 20 years ago and force the kids to wear "flip-ups" from the drug store, cut to fit with cuticle scissors and shaped with a nail file! Many of those photos from Orlando have been, well ...lost in a great fire!
- ✓ **Graduations** abound in May and June and so do the opportunities to advertise gift certificates or gift cards. We usually think about those things around the winter holidays, but gift certificates are perfect suggestions for friends or relatives who haven't seen the graduate since the kid was 10 and haven't a clue about size, interests or future plans. More importantly, it drives potential new patients into your establishment and that's always a good thing. Oh, and please put that gift certificate or card in something more imaginative than a business envelope. Most party stores have wonderful ideas on how to present them with appropriate packaging. Make it memorable!
- ✓ **Showers** are the time for fun and imagination. The bride-to-be should be the most radiant woman in the room. This is her moment and the gift of new contacts or glasses to compliment her gown is a very thoughtful gift. In fact, it's the one part of her entire outfit that is most overlooked, that is until the very last minute when the bride discovers that tortoise shell really doesn't go with everything or that her eyes will be so much more beautiful in the photographs with the addition of tinted contact lenses. **Baby showers** are another golden opportunity for thoughtful gift-giving. What Mom wouldn't appreciate a pair of cool shades to cover the visible effects of sleepless nights? Even the new baby would appreciate some infant-sized sunglasses and there are many possibilities out there to choose from, just make sure that the lenses are good quality and that the design is comfortable and properly fitted. And don't forget Dad either. Today's new Dads are more involved with their new additions than ever before and he isn't getting any more sleep than Mom. Dad could use a new pair of sunglasses as well!
- ✓ **The Wedding**. Big budget or small. One attendant or 5. The decision on what to give the members of the wedding party is a difficult one. Jewelry of some sort is the traditional choice. But really, how many pair



of engraved cufflinks or charms can you wear? How about suggesting matching sunglasses? One look for the guys and one for the gals. You know that at least some of the pictures will be outside, so rather than squinty eyes and forced smiles, how about uber-cool sunwear and out-loud laughs! Take this opportunity to help the happy couple create a wedding album to remember!

None of these events will require extensive or expensive displays, just small reminders throughout your dispensary. Train and remind your staff to ask questions about upcoming events.

- 🕒 How many weeks until graduation?
- 🕒 When and where are you going on vacation?
- 🕒 Is that an engagement ring?

You can do some cross-marketing with bridal shops, hair salons, travel agencies and wedding planners. Draw on your own experiences and your staffs as well. Should-a, would-a, could-a is a great jumping off place for brainstorming with your staff.

Now, spring training. Not just baseball, but soccer, softball, swimming, tennis, golf, all the sports that require specific eyewear considerations. This is your moment to differentiate your practice from the big box retailers. You and your staff have a unique opportunity to become the local experts in sport-specific eyewear and eye safety. Most vendors of sports eyewear have great information about their products and the benefits of using them, either online or in print. Dust off those textbooks and re-educate yourself on the effects of colors and the benefits of certain lens and frame materials. Do your research. Talk to the local golf pro, tennis, baseball and soccer coaches about how you can help their athletes, young and old, improve their games and protect their vision. Dedicate a portion of your dispensary to sports-specific eyewear and designate a staff member as the in-house expert. Advise your patients to make an appointment with this expert to discuss their sports related visual needs. Appointments are an excellent way to emphasize the importance of that expert advice. Speak to the parents' groups associated with the leagues in your area or at your local schools. Advise the local media that you and your in-house expert are available for interviews or have pre-written articles that can be easily inserted into the local papers.

I learned years ago that when the forsythia starts to bloom, it's time to start fertilizing the grass and preparing the flower beds and gardens. It's also the sign that we survived winter and that warm weather and outdoor activities are just around the corner. Runners take to sidewalks and bikers hit the road. Kids start daydreaming and internet posters get a little snarky. It should be your signal to ramp up your practice and dispensary to answer the siren call of the soccer fields, baseball yards, golf courses and beaches.

Ladies and gentlemen, eyecare professionals of every kind, please start your engines!