

PRACTICE EXPANSION SERIES

Optometry Practice Expansion:

A Guide to Growth

Strategic Guide on Commercial Leasing, Clinic Design, and Diagnostic Technology Integration
for the Modern Optometrist

Strategic Advisory & Custom Consultations

We understand that every independent practice or optical retail location possesses its own specific characteristics and a complex array of local variables, including distinct community demographics, patient spending power, clientele expectations, management preferences, and unique staffing dynamics. Therefore, Dr. Hettler and Mani can be contacted directly to discuss your specific requirements further and support your optical retail business long-term. By partnering together, we can set tailored operational benchmarks and build a retail strategy worthy of your practice's future goals.

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OPTICAL RETAIL CONSULTANTSSM

Published: July 2026

Executive Summary: Unlocking Your Clinic's Revenue Potential

Expanding your optometry practice is one of the most rewarding milestones you will encounter. As primary eye care evolves toward advanced medical eye care models—including dedicated dry eye centers, myopia management clinics, and state-of-the-art diagnostic imaging—having the physical space to match your clinical scope of practice becomes critical to growth.

When daily scheduling is booked out more than three weeks in advance, your optical showroom is congested, or you lack space for critical technology (such as high-definition OCTs and automated edgers), you have hit your production ceiling. This guide helps you navigate this transition while protecting your clinic's physical and financial assets.

"An optometry practice cannot expand its medical patient base or premium eyewear sales without strategically addressing the design, structure, and underlying legal lease of its physical space."

Step 1: Define Objectives & Quantify the Expansion Formula

Before planning, you must align your expansion with a concrete financial roadmap. Adding a physical exam lane or expanding optical retail floor space directly impacts your practice production. Optometric clinical revenue can be modeled using the following economic relationship:

$$R_{total} = (E \times C_{capture} \times V_{optical}) + (M \times V_{medical})$$

Where:

- R_{total} : Total Annual Practice Revenue
- E : Comprehensive Eye Examinations conducted annually
- $C_{capture}$: Optical Capture Rate (percentage of patients purchasing prescription frames and lenses on-site)
- $V_{optical}$: Average Retail Eyewear Transaction Value
- M : Specialty / Medical Eyecare Visits
- $V_{medical}$: Average Clinical / Medical billing rate per visit

Assess where your bottleneck lies: low capture rates ($C_{capture}$) require high-end dispensary expansion; capped exams (E) require additional physical lanes and divided pre-testing rooms.

Step 2: Decode the Hazards in Your Existing Commercial Lease

Before approaching your landlord to expand adjacent units or prepare a relocation, audit three high-risk provisions:

- Right of First Refusal (ROFR):** Grants you legal priority to lease neighboring square footage if it vacates, preventing competing medical or retail tenants from locking you out.
- The Surrender & Restoration Trap:** Avoid clauses requiring you to return the unit to a raw "shell" state. Demolishing custom optical millwork, medical partition walls, and plumbing can cost upwards of \$50,000 to \$100,000.
- Practice Downtime & Relocation:** Ensure the landlord cannot force-relocate your practice at your expense. Moving sensitive optical diagnostics (OCT, retinal cameras) requires professional calibration, creating critical clinic downtime.

Step 3: Assemble Your Multi-Disciplinary Expansion Team

An optometry buildout is a highly specialized medical-retail hybrid. Build a specialized team to protect your investment:

1. Ophthalmic Equipment Consultant Coordinates lane dimensional requirements (8-to-10-foot setups), automated refraction systems, digital phoropters, and network cabling back to your EHR database.	2. Eyecare Space Planner & Designer Designs compliant patient pathways and traffic flows, exam rooms, pre-testing rooms, lab, contact lens area, personal office, and most importantly a high-end eyewear showroom.	3. Specialty Contractor Manages optometry practice infrastructure: sink installations in every exam room, dimmable lighting circuits, and isolated power lines for scanner stability as well as wood blocking in the showroom area.	4. Commercial Lease Attorney Reviews and modifies the commercial lease to protect your practice equity, negotiate non-compete covenants, and ease future practice transition or sale.
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Step 4: Analyze Adjacent Expansion vs. Relocation

Deciding between knocking down an adjacent wall or relocating to a customized site dictates your capital expenditure (CapEx), project timeline, and market presence:

Critical Factor	Adjacent Expansion (Knocking Down Walls)	Relocation to New Site
Capital Expenditure (CapEx)	Moderate. Leverages existing waiting rooms, clinical networks, and optical dispensary layout.	High. Requires entirely new plumbing, HVAC, clinical partitions, and storefront retail.
Practice Downtime	Low to Moderate. Construction can be phased; current exam lanes often remain functional.	High during moving week. Requires immediate recalibration of high-end diagnostic equipment.
Lease Negotiation	Complex. The landlord may try to keep two separate leases on different timelines or inflate rent.	Clean Slate. Ability to negotiate a unified, long-term commercial lease with Tenant Improvement (TI) allowances.
Market Exposure	Unchanged. Retains existing demographic footprint and patients' geographic familiarity.	High potential. Allows repositioning to areas with higher vehicle traffic or demographics.

Step 5: Clinical Flow & Optical Dispensary Design

Optometric office design requires balancing patient clinical privacy with luxury retail merchandising. The patient journey must be intuitive and flow linearly to maximize efficiency and dispensary sales:

1. Entrance & Reception

Warm, inviting lighting, clean check-in, and minimal medical clutter.

2. Pre-Testing Suite

A centralized room containing auto-refractors, visual fields, and retinal cameras. Dimmable lighting controls are essential for quick adjustment.

3. Exam Lanes

The core revenue generator. Standard size should be 10 feet long (or 8 feet with mirror setups). Sinks must allow you to face patients while washing hands to demonstrate clinical hygiene compliance.

4. The Warm Handoff

Position the optical dispensary directly adjacent to exam lanes. Personally hand off the patient to your optician, reviewing specific lens and lens coating recommendations. The retail optical space should utilize high-CRI (95+) lighting to ensure frame colors represent accurately.

Step 6: Eliminate Commercial Lease Traps Prior to Signing

Before signing your long-term commercial lease, have your specialty legal team modify three critical terms:

- **The Non-Compete Exclusivity Clause:** Explicitly state that the landlord cannot lease any space in the retail plaza, business park, or multi-tenant building to another optometrist, ophthalmologist, or national corporate optical retail chain.
- **Assignment & Subletting (Practice Succession):** Ensure the lease guarantees transfer approval to any qualified optometrist with a valid state license without triggering rental increases or giving the landlord a cut of your practice's sale goodwill value.
- **Death & Disability Protection:** Ensure that if you suffer a career-ending injury or pass away, your estate can terminate the lease or transfer it within 180 days without severe financial penalties.

Step 7: Construction, Equipment Calibration & Grand Opening

Execute your clinic's buildout and launch with operational precision:

- **Dust Containment:** Complete drywall sanding, painting, and HVAC cleaning before unboxing diagnostics. Airborne drywall dust settles on internal lenses, ruining fine optical calibrations.
- **Permits & Inspections:** Schedule medical electrical and plumbing clearances early to prevent delayed operational certificates.
- **Trunk Shows & Grand Opening:** Host trunk shows with frame designers, combining premium eyewear sales with dry-eye spa demonstrations. Sync this with digital marketing and localized SEO to maximize community exposure.
- **AI Visibility Planning:** Be sure to discuss your AI visibility strategy with Dr. David Hettler and Mani Vaghedi, President & CEO, CNS | ORM | ORCSM. It's one of the most important investments you can make in your practice's future.