

Patient Buying Behavior: Patients Don't Buy Products, They Buy Experiences

ABO Continuing Education • Timed Course Outline • 50 minutes (1.0 CE credit hour)

LECTURER & COURSE INFORMATION

Lecturer: Patrick Stifter, OD

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores how patients make buying decisions and why the overall experience often determines whether they say yes to additional solutions. The course will help optical teams understand how trust, perceived value, lifestyle questioning, and confident recommendations influence purchasing behavior. The primary objective is to unlock second-pair opportunities by helping staff position additional eyewear as a natural extension of the patient's needs, lifestyle, and overall experience.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion, the participant will be able to:

1. Describe the emotional and rational factors that drive patients' eyewear purchasing decisions at the dispensing table — including urgency, trust, and social proof — and explain how communicating perceived value rather than price influences frame and lens selection.
2. Differentiate the buying traits, motivators, and communication preferences of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, and adapt the dispensing conversation to each generation to improve eyewear recommendations and patient satisfaction.
3. Apply active-listening and post-purchase follow-up techniques in the optical to overcome common dispensing objections (such as "I'll think about it"), recognize personal bias that limits eyewear recommendations, and build long-term patient loyalty.

TIMED COURSE OUTLINE (50 MINUTES)

Introduction Slides 1–3 • 3 min

- Title and framing: what truly drives patient purchasing behavior — beyond just price.
- Purpose: identify the emotional and rational factors influencing decisions across generations; recognize the role of trust, perceived value, and experience; equip staff to overcome barriers, adapt communication, and avoid sales bias; strengthen post-purchase engagement and loyalty.
- **Key message:** patients don't just buy products — they buy experiences and trust.

Section I: Why We Buy Slides 4–11 • 11 min

- **Why we buy** — consumers buy based on conscious or subconscious needs and desires; align practice messaging with what truly matters to patients.
- **Emotional vs. rational decisions** — patients buy with emotion first, then justify with logic; practices that connect emotionally (confidence, security, excitement) outperform those focused only on features.
- **Three core drivers of buying:**
 - Urgency — patients act when there is a compelling reason (limited-time offers, seasonal promotions).
 - Trust — a strong relationship with the professional reduces hesitation and builds confidence.
 - Social proof — patients are influenced by peers, testimonials, and what they see others wearing.

- **Value vs. price** — patients spend where they feel understood and respected; note that roughly 78% of Americans report living paycheck to paycheck.
- **Perception of value** — five drivers shape it: quality, service, convenience, level of need, and price — emphasize value rather than competing on price alone.

Section II: Generational Buying Differences **Slides 12–16 · 9 min**

- Different generations interpret value, trust, and communication differently; tailoring the conversation improves outcomes and builds loyalty.
- **Baby Boomers (1946–1964)** — loyal, quality-focused, prefer in-person service; motivated by expertise, reliability, and warranty reassurance; reach via brochures, face-to-face, mailers, and phone.
- **Generation X (1965–1980)** — independent, skeptical, research-heavy; motivated by transparency, convenience, and efficiency; reach via comparison charts, clear ROI, flexible payment, email, and text.
- **Millennials / Gen Y (1981–1995)** — tech-savvy, socially influenced, value-driven; motivated by peer reviews, values alignment, and loyalty rewards; reach via strong online presence, personalized messaging, and storytelling.
- **Generation Z (1995–2012)** — mobile-first, quick decision-makers, peer-influenced online; motivated by urgency, customization, and social visibility; reach via social platforms, instant purchase options, and gamified loyalty.
- Reinforce: one size does not fit all.

Section III: Office Buying Behavior Patterns **Slides 17–20 · 8 min**

- **Omni-channel experience** — younger patients expect seamless online-to-office integration (browse frames online → saved in chart → staff aware and prepared); builds consistency and trust across touchpoints.
- **Technology to support the experience** — pricing transparency increases confidence (restaurant-menu analogy: clarity, not hidden fees); tools include digital catalogs, automated texts, and CRM reminders.
- **Overcoming buying barriers (staff training)** — the common “I’ll think about it” objection reframed as reassurance (“What concerns can I clarify now?”); tailor by generation; recognize staffing bias, such as assuming younger patients won’t spend.

Section IV: Post-Purchase Engagement **Slides 21–24 · 7 min**

- **Clinic comebacks** — specialized programs (dry eye, myopia management, aesthetics, custom eyewear) that position medical expertise and long-term care.
- **Optical comebacks** — multiple pairs, contact lenses, and technology upgrades, positioned as lifestyle solutions rather than upsells.
- **Loyalty programs & reactivation** — tailor follow-up by generation (phone/mail, email, text, social), and borrow ideas from outside eye care (wine clubs, subscription boxes).

Section V: Communication Skills **Slides 25–27 · 7 min**

- **Active listening** — be fully present, ask open questions, reflect and paraphrase, show empathy, and summarize and confirm; reveals unspoken motivators.
- **Generational shifts in conversation** — tailor the message by generation: longevity and service (Boomers), comparison and options (Gen X), lifestyle and values (Millennials), customization and sharing online (Gen Z).

Section VI: Key Takeaway & Call to Action **Slides 28–29 · 5 min**

- **Focus beyond price** — patients value trust, experience, and personalization more than cost; tailoring the experience by generation strengthens loyalty and long-term revenue.
- **Call to action** — build trust through active listening, use technology to create seamless experiences, and personalize patient communication by generation.
- **Closing line:** “Patients don’t just buy products — they buy experiences and trust.”