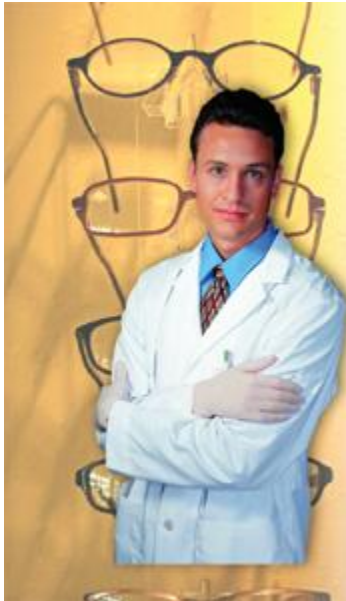


## labs: in-house or outsource?

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By [Liz Meszaros](#)



Whether a dispensing ophthalmologist chooses to establish an in-house finishing lab or outsource orders to an off-site lab, there are certain services that should be expected. Equipment suppliers provide a wide range of services for the clinician who may be expanding the optical dispensary.

Making the decision to finish lenses in-house is as individualized as each ophthalmic practice. But there are a few common considerations to review.

"The main reason to get your own lab is for customer service. When you're outsourcing, you are subjected to the errors of that outsourcing source; you're subjected to a time element," said John Corsini, president of Super Systems Optical Technologies, Cincinnati, OH.

"It's more important today than it ever has been to offer that service, and the only way to do that is to do your lenses and glasses in your own office," Corsini continued.

Super Systems Optical Technologies offers the FastGrind system that lets ophthalmologists grind lenses in their offices without a large capital outlay and in less space than has been traditionally required. The Fast Grind system requires only 5 square feet of space, costs less than \$24,000, and is computer-guided.

Baby boomers make up a large part of the market for multifocal spectacle lenses, according to Corsini.

"The baby boomers are used to fast service because it was always given to them with single-vision lenses," he said. "Now, they need more expensive progressive lenses, and they expect the same kind of service. They grew up with fast food and fast photos."

The decision to go with an in-house lab is an important one, and several factors need to be considered. Many companies, such as Briot Weco, offer turnkey service for ophthalmologists who are considering an in-house lab.

Ophthalmologists should go through a complete business analysis before making the decision of in-house versus outsourcing lenses to an independent lab. Briot Weco, for example, will confer with the ophthalmologist and go through a complete business analysis.

"Over the course of a few hours, our sales representatives will consult with ophthalmologists and go over how to run their dispensaries better," said Bret Davis, president of Briot Weco, Alpharetta, GA. "Sometimes, we recommend purchasing an in-house lab as the answer, and in some cases, we don't. For the majority of ophthalmologists, however, an in-house lab is a good fit."

Choosing the proper equipment for the practice is also a large part of the decision, continued Davis. Briot Weco offers a complete line of edgers, from the standard edger to the top-of-the-line machines, with a full range of capabilities including lensometer, drill, polish, groove, and shape manipulation.

"One of the mistakes most businesses make is buying capital equipment based on their needs today," Davis said. "We tell doctors to buy capital equipment that will meet your needs today and in the future, so that 3 years from now, you don't have to buy another piece of equipment."

More support Staff training is also a large consideration, and most manufacturers will offer training programs and support.

For instance, at Super Systems Optical Technologies, the FastGrind was specifically designed to be a more affordable and easier-to-operate method of grinding prescription spectacle lenses in order to help ophthalmologists compete with the large national optical chains and still retain their customer base.

Briot Weco offers the Briot Excel CLD, which drills, has a 5D tracer, and the ability to customize shapes. Like Super Systems, Briot Weco offers staff training.

"We spend 2 days with the doctor and staff, training not only on the edger, but on how to get the most for their money, stock lenses, and how to sell to patients," Davis said.

"Training goes beyond telling them which buttons to push. That takes less than a day because the equipment is so easy to run. It will change the way you do business," he added.

Customer service and support are also a large part of the package ophthalmologists should expect as well.

Most companies offer a support staff, as well as 24-hour support lines for full support of their equipment on any day, at any time.