

## Six Things To Look For When Buying Eyeglasses On the Internet

By - Bob the Master Optician

Wow, things have sure changed! Five years ago, who would have ever thought that consumers would be buying shoes over the internet (Zappos.com), getting medical advice on the web (WebMD.com) and yes, even purchasing diamonds that costs thousands of dollars (BlueNile.com). So when I say that you can buy eyeglasses on the internet, you may not be totally surprised. People are happily doing it by the thousands everyday; and the numbers are growing. However, anytime there is a cultural shift in consumer buying habits, along comes the scam artists or “fly by night” companies that just don’t deliver on the consumers’ expectations. So, if you decide to purchase eyeglasses on the internet, how do you know if you are dealing with a reputable web site that is going to give you good value, acceptable quality, and deliver what you expect?

I have been in the optical business for over 35 years. I have a Masters in Ophthalmic Optics and have worked for Lenscrafters, Eyemasters, lectured internationally on eyeglass quality and have consulted for private optometrists, ophthalmologists and frame/lens manufacturers. So when I first heard that companies were selling eyeglasses over the internet; I cringed. Over the past few years, I have studied most of the internet eyewear sites. Some of them are good, but most fall short of being a good eyeglass provider. However, I must admit, I have begun to change my thoughts on buying eyeglasses on the internet. It is possible to get a good value, it is more convenient and you can get good quality – if you go to the right web sites. So, I have developed a list of six things you should be looking for when you consider purchasing eyeglasses over the internet.

#1 **Value vs. really low price** –There is an old saying “if it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is too good to be true!” This is really the case when buying eyeglasses (on the internet or in person). Several sites are selling eyeglasses starting at \$7.95. When you consider the average pair of glasses sells for about \$220 in the US today, you have to ask yourself - ***can you really get a good pair of glasses for \$7.95?*** Eyeglasses are not only a fashion item, but they are also a medical device (helping you do every visual task throughout the day). Can you really trust a place that is selling glasses for over 90% less than the national average? On the other hand, it is possible to save a lot of money by purchasing eyeglasses on the internet. Internet eyewear companies usually do not have all of the overhead expenses of “bricks and mortar” location. Retail optical stores have to pay for expensive rents every month, eye exam equipment and the high cost of TV/newspaper advertising. Since internet eyewear sites do not have all of those expenses, they are able to pass the savings onto you. But there has to be some justification/sanity to the amount of savings.

***I am finding that you should expect to see a savings on the internet of about 30% to 50% of what you would normally pay at a mall retail optical location or private practice optometrist.*** So look for sites that offer a basic pair of glasses starting about \$50 (non-designer frame and basic single vision lenses) and go up from there.

#2 **Frame Selection** – Consumers have proven that they like to have choices and options. The bigger the selection, the better! This is why large shopping malls, super stores and web sites like Zappos.com and Amazon.com have flourished. This is especially true when it comes to shopping for eyeglasses – people want a large selection of frames to choose from. Most independent optometrist/optical shops only display about 300 to 400 different frame styles. Many eyeglass internet sites are very small companies that can't really afford to carry many frames. There are quite a few sites that only carry "close out" frames and have a limited selection. ***However, some web sites offer a huge selection of frame styles, both designer brand names and non-branded, from 15% to 50% off regular optical retail locations.*** If you want to make sure you are getting the best fit, the best shape for your face and the latest fashion/styling available (not old outdated models), look for those web sites that carry a large selection of frames with up-to-date brand (designer) name and non-brand high quality frames.

#3 **Try-at-Home Frame Trial Program** – How do you know if that frame on the internet is really going to look good on you and fit? Several internet eyeglass sites have a "virtual mirror". With this system, you can upload your digital photo and virtually "try on" some of their frames. Some of these virtual mirrors are better than others. However, the best way to know if a frame is a good fit, color and style for you, is to have the internet eyeglass company send you several frames (without the prescription lenses) to try on at home or the office. This way you not only get to try on the frames before you have lenses made for the frame, but you can get an opinion from your spouse, friend, family or co-workers (your "eyeglass buying committee!"). Ask the internet eyeglass provider if they will send you a few frames to try on; before you have the lenses made.

#4 **Guaranteed Quality** – If any company truly believes in their product, they will offer a guarantee. If they won't stand behind their product, why should you trust them? Eyeglass internet web sites offer a variety of eyeglass guarantees. You'll see anything from no guarantee to several months of coverage. Some will offer a guarantee on the frame, but no return/refund policy on the lenses. Sometimes you will really need to read the fine print to know what they offer. To really have confidence in a internet company that sells prescription eyeglasses, look for those sites that make their guarantee very clear and post it right on the home page. ***You should expect to have a 100% exchange or money back SATISFACTION guarantee that is good for 30 days.*** Anything less than that and there is a risk that you will not get the quality you expect and get stuck with a pair of glasses you hate.

#5 **Professional Oversight** – There are many good reasons we go to doctors and professionals for our healthcare. It is really no different with eyecare. You should always follow your eye doctors' recommendations for when to get an eye exam. However, you should not feel obligated to get your eyeglasses from them. It is a Federal Law that the eye doctor that does your eye exam has to voluntarily give you a copy of the eyeglass prescription (and at no extra cost). If they don't give it to you, ask for a copy. You have a right to it. It is possible to get good quality eyeglasses that are custom made to your doctor's prescription that are not purchased from them (that is, if you are selective and careful of where you purchase). If you decide to purchase your eyeglasses online, look for a web site that has professional oversight. There are a few sites that have certified opticians that supervise your entire eyeglass order. ***In fact, one site [www.HalfPriceEyeglasses.com](http://www.HalfPriceEyeglasses.com) has a failsafe system that will not allow the eyeglasses to be processed until a staff optician reviews and approves the prescription.*** In fact, if they have any questions about the eyeglass prescription (about 25% of all orders), the optician will call the customer or their eye doctor to confirm everything is correct.

#6 **Good Customer Service** – Let's face it, even though you want the convenience of buying things on-line, you still want to know there is a live person somewhere that you can talk to if you have a questions or concerns about your order/product. ***A quality web site (especially for eyeglasses) should have a toll free phone number you can call to get advice or get questions answered.*** Many of the internet eyeglass web sites will only communicate through email. To be able to truly trust a web site, make sure they have a phone number you can call that is prominently displayed on the web site. If you have to hunt around to find a number, then chances are they really don't want you to bother them with a phone call.

**Bottom line** - So mosey up to your monitor/keyboard and go eyeglass shopping (even at 2am in the morning!). If you use these six steps to insure you are getting a good value and high quality from an internet eyewear company, you can save a lot of money and time.

Comments or questions, email - [bob@themasteroptician.com](mailto:bob@themasteroptician.com)