



An overnight vision correction (OVC) venture called i-GO is seeking UK practices to offer a newly branded version of orthokeratology. At a launch at Wembley Stadium on January 30 the venture will seek to sign up 50 practices in the London area from 100 invited guests. Practices signing up to the i-GO OVC system will benefit from a £1m marketing campaign, a free state-of-the-art topographer and a suite of support and training material. The OVC system being promoted by i-GO is about to enter clinical trials with an eye drop, which it is hoped, will fix the OVC correction for up to a year. This, says the firm, could revolutionise the eye care market.



## RETAIL SALES

# Optics reports mixed results for December

By Alex Thomas

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Optical practices from around the country had a mixed trading period in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Some outperformed sales from the previous year, while for others business was sluggish, an *Optician* news poll has revealed.

*Optician's* findings come at a time when the UK high street has largely experienced a downturn during the festive period. Figures from the British Retail Consortium (BRC) published this week revealed that December sales across the entire British retail sector rose only 0.3 per cent on a like-for-like basis, compared with December 2006. This represented the weakest monthly performance for the British retail sector since the decline in March 2006.

Practice director John Davidson of Querido & Davidson Optometrists in Newcastle upon Tyne said his business had experienced only minor growth. When given the BRC's figures he asserted: 'We would mirror that, our growth for last year as a whole was 0.5 per cent.'

In the capital, Perry Sabner, practice manager of Hoxton Opticians, claimed that December was always a slow month. He explained: 'This year was a little bit better than the year before, but not by much. Ever since I can



December sales were sluggish across the entire UK retail sector

remember December has always been a dead month.'

Another London practice to endure a difficult December was LK Leon Opticians. Practice manager Martin Payne said: 'December was slow and slightly down on the previous year.'

In the Causeway shopping complex outside of Bristol, Marian Blake Opticians enjoyed a much cheerier Christmas. Practice manager Narinder Bamrah said: 'Sales in December were up 10 per cent in comparison to December 2006.'

He painted a positive picture of 2007, asserting that 'sales for 2007 as a whole were up 20 per cent on 2006, which in turn were up 20 per cent on 2005'. Asked if such impressive sales

had been achieved through offers or promotions, Bamrah answered: 'No, our sight tests remained the same price.'

Toni and Guy Opticians of Manchester were also upbeat about December's sales figures. Optical assistant Lynne Taylor said: 'Sales were up on the previous year, but we're a relatively new practice and sales have been growing month on month anyway as more people get to hear about us.'

'This was only our third Christmas,' she added.

Asked if they were offering any promotions to encourage sales, she explained: 'In December we offered free sight tests for customers that bought specs and that worked very well. In January we're doing a two-for-one offer on frames and that's going great too.'

December was a slow month for Portland Eyecare which operates practices in Birmingham and Staffordshire. 'December did go quiet, although sales were up slightly on the year before,' said area manager Rachel Whitehouse. 'But financially, December's performance was about equal to December 2006.'

In Aberdeen, Jon Quipp, practice manager of Black and Lizards, divulged that without running any promotions December's sales performance was up on last year and over target.

'You could say it was a very good December,' he concluded.

## STATISTICS

## FODO surveys optical market

The Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians (FODO) has published the 27th edition of its industry fact sheet *Optics at a Glance*.

Drawn from government statistics and a survey of FODO members, the latest edition contains valuable information about optometry and the optical market. Some of its key points include:

- The number of NHS sight tests carried out in 2006-07 rose by an average of 1.3 per cent in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to 13.1 million.

- In Scotland the NHS paid for 64 per cent more sight tests than in the previous year as a result of the introduction of free NHS sight tests for all in April 2006

- The estimated number of private sight tests in the UK was 5.4 million (applying Information Centre calculations to England, Wales and Northern Ireland and factoring in the significant reduction in Scotland)

- The FODO survey also revealed that 71 per cent of sight tests in the survey resulted in a changed or new prescription, 33 per cent of patients having spectacles dispensed used an NHS optical voucher to pay for all or part of the cost and the average interval between sight tests has remained 26 months.

To review the full findings, a copy of *Optics at a Glance* can be requested from FODO by emailing Anne Fedrick at [anne@fodo.com](mailto:anne@fodo.com) or downloaded from the website ([www.fodo.com](http://www.fodo.com)).