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LENS & LAB SPECIAL

January 2016

SELLING PROTECTION

There's been a surge of interest in protective coatings in recent years. **eyes** finds out how opticians can really capitalise on this important add on.

In a risk-averse society, protective lens coatings should be an easy sell, especially now that many of the issues around quality and longevity have been addressed by manufacturers. "When the benefits of the higher grade coatings are fully explained, such as the easy to clean properties, additional anti reflection properties and greater scratch resistance, most patients are happy to pay a premium for these however the more price sensitive patient may choose the least expensive option," explains Andy Sanders, Professional Services Manager, Hoya. Consequently it makes sense for opticians to identify particular consumer concerns and talk to their patients about these issues, aiming to alleviate anxieties through the recommendation of a particular coating.

Driving

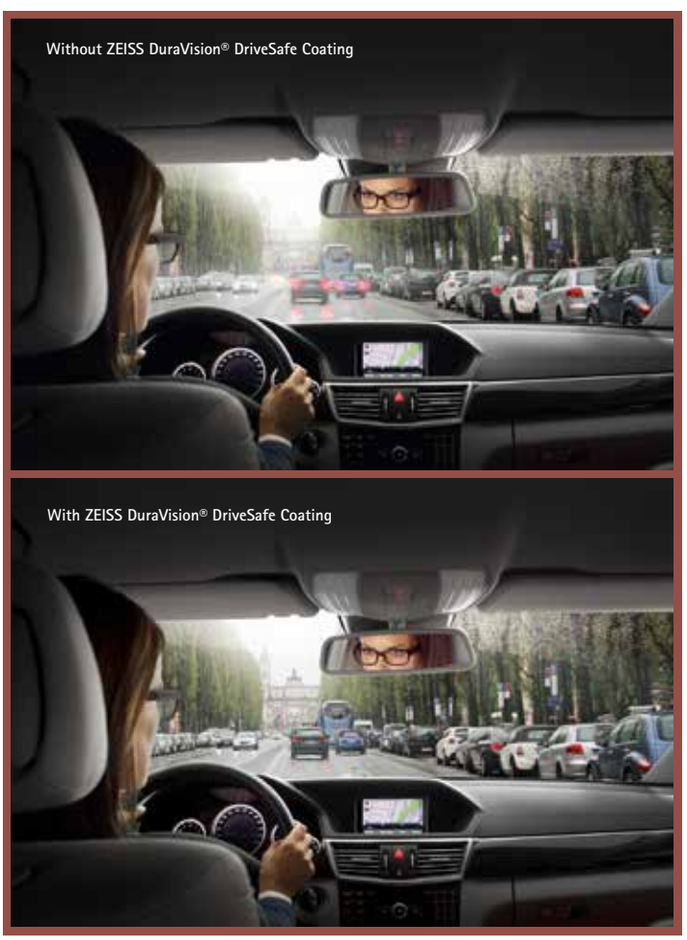
Driving is an obvious place to start, as many people are insecure about visibility when driving, particularly in bad weather.

Anti reflective (AR) lenses in particular are becoming more popular on the back of several marketing campaigns and the big chains offering AR as a standard option. ZEISS lenses have spotted this opportunity and developed DuraVision Platinum AR coating. These hard and light lenses are very robust, dirt-resistant and easy to clean while offering first-rate AR properties. An integrated system of coating layers densely packed using ion-assisted deposition results in a lens surface that is three times harder than the previous generation of hard AR coated plastic ZEISS lenses and 35 per cent harder than AR coated mineral ZEISS lenses.

"With these lenses, ZEISS is introducing a new lens product category for everyday use. It is specifically designed to meet the vision needs of people who want to feel safer and more comfortable when driving with their everyday lenses," explains Peter Robertson, Marketing and Communications Director, ZEISS Group.

One Careless Owner

For anyone who treats his or her glasses with little respect, the prospect of a scratch resistant lens can seem like a Godsend. However in the past, anti-scratch coatings haven't been taken very seriously and sometimes failed to perform, especially for those who are really rough on their frames. "Scratch resistant coatings in isolation often meet with customer scepticism and mistrust primarily because these coatings are invisible and the customer cannot see what they have paid for, furthermore whilst the dispenser will explain these coatings are scratch resistant but not scratch proof this fact is often forgotten," says Sanders of Hoya.

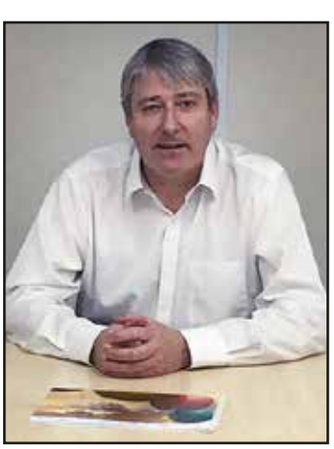


However Nikon says that its scratch resistant coatings have proven to work for the consumer, as long as the consumer understands it is a scratch resistant coating only, not scratch proof.

"With the new technology of Nanoflex and Power Guard on the SeeCoat lenses, the consumers are seeing the benefits of harder wearing longer lasting lenses. The added benefit of the 18 month no quibble guarantee gives reassurance to the consumer of the quality of Nikon coatings," says Teresa Sweet, Professional Services and Products Advisor for Nikon Optical UK. Nikon has made improvements to the robustness of the coatings, SeeCoat Plus UV and SeeCoat Blue UV. Both use Power Guard technology to manufacture a 60 per cent thicker coating than a conventional coating along with Nanoflex technology providing optimal flexibility in the coating.

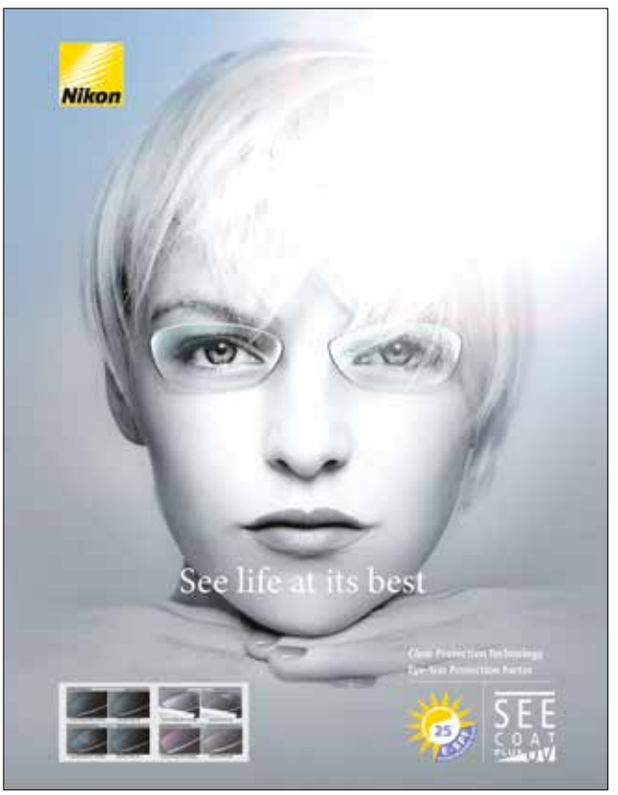
And for consumers who have been hard to convince when it comes to the often invisible benefits of these lens coatings, there's good news: "Scratch resistant coatings combined with AR coatings now offer the patient a tantalising combination of properties. As the AR coatings are visible due to their reflection colour, they can see what they are paying for," says Sanders of Hoya.

However John Quincey, Managing Director, Quincey Eyewear does offer one caveat; "Education from optician to wearer on the proper cleaning and handling of lenses, coated or otherwise, is still very important to avoid customer dissatisfaction. The term abrasion resistant must always be used in preference to scratch resistant when selling to the customer. Sharp grit or sand can penetrate the toughest of coatings," he says. Mark Marland, Sales Director, Optimum RX Lens Specialists agrees: "Hard coat expectations need to be managed better to meet consumer expectations, we never say our hard coat is scratch proof but it is an anti-scratch coating to help prolong the life of the



Mark Marland, Sales Director, Optimum

Below: SeeCoat Blue Premium, Nikon.



Top: SeeCoat Plus UV, Nikon.

lens during day to day general use."

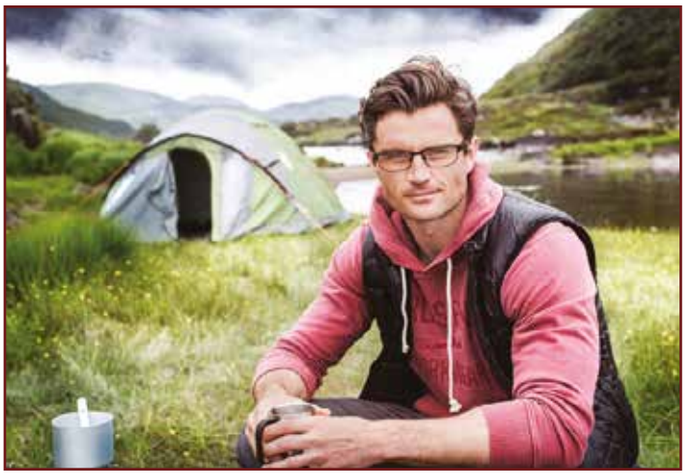
UV Fears

There has been a really successful campaign to explain the values of UV coatings and now blue light is also attracting the same attention, following the exponential increase in the use of digital devices. No surprises then that this sector is set to increase, albeit cautiously when it comes to any medical claims regarding blue reflecting coatings.

"There is growing interest and much debate about the need to block blue light. This has traditionally been achieved with special dyes that can extend from the UV blocking range right up to 600nm. The higher levels of blue block tend to be required for medical purposes and the lenses have a dark orange brown colour. However lighter dyes that absorb up to 20 per cent of blue light give minimal colour not dissimilar to the new blue block coatings that also have a strong blue reflection," explains Quincey of Quincey Eyewear.

Nikon is certainly heavily invested in this market. "Blue light is becoming a more spoken about subject as it is being investigated in more depth. Nikon SeeCoat Blue UV lens helps relieve the effect of blue light from digital devices believed to be responsible for eye-fatigue and eye strain, with the anti reflection properties transmitting 97.5 per cent of light which is nearly as much as the SeeCoat Plus UV transmitting 99.9 per cent," says Sweet of Nikon Optical UK.

As a world pioneer of blue cut AR coating, Nikon has also developed the latest version, SeeCoat Blue UV premium, launching in early 2016. "Ghost image has been reduced by 65 per cent from 0.11 per cent to 0.04 per cent. Nikon have minimised the blue reflection by 25 per cent and are using a blue light absorber to absorb more blue light cutting by a further 11 per cent," adds Sweet.



HOYA Hi-Vision LongLife, award winning AR coating

Fog, Water, Oil

A little more niche, there are other coatings that may be worth exploring too, particularly to provide a bespoke service for a particular customer's need. Anti-fog coatings are one such specialised sector, predominantly used for sports and safety glasses. "Anti-fog treatment has become more important with increasing sales of prescription sports spectacles. As yet there is no permanent once and for all treatment and it is down to the wearer to properly clean and apply regular treatments," says Quincey of Quincey Eyewear.

This cleaning process also poses challenges. As these coatings often need to be cleaned more frequently with a special cloth and while the anti-fog properties last longer after cleaning, impregnated cloths are now available which can work well with 'standard' coatings. For example Hoya offers anti-fog cloths via VSE shop or on Hoyanet.

> "When the benefits of higher grade coatings are fully explained - easy to clean properties, additional anti reflection properties and greater scratch resistance - most patients are happy to pay a premium."
>
> **Andy Sanders, Professional Services Manager, HOYA**

Consumers may well be impressed with Hydrophobic and Oleophobic coatings. "Super slippery coatings which resist grease and smearing are now available, but the dispenser should be wary that over a period of time these properties can reduce. HOYA's Hi-Vision LongLife coating is hydrophobic, oleophobic and antistatic, maintaining excellent performance for the life of the lens," says Sanders.

Nikon is also interested in anti oil and water coatings. "Nikon has hydrophobic and oleophobic coatings within the SeeCoat Plus UV and SeeCoat Blue UV, these elements are there to prevent marks adhering to the lens, which would reduce the clarity of the coating. The Oleophobic coating causes oils to bead on the lens rather than spread across it, keeping it cleaner for longer and making the lens easier to clean. The Hydrophobic coating prevents water molecules from building up, again making Nikon lenses easier to clean," explains Sweet.

And Optimum applies hydrophobic coatings to all its anti reflection coatings as standard. "This is very effective in dispersing water drops and this application will last the life of the coating.

We also apply Oleophoibic coatings to our premium coatings, normally ordered by labs for added protection reducing the risk of slippage during glazing," says Marland of Optimum.

Looking Ahead

There's plenty of potential for growth in the near future. "By effective factual communication of the benefits of different coatings we can both impress and satisfy our patients, ensuring that their wants and needs are met, ultimately this will boost reputation and profits as well as enhance eye care," says Sanders of Hoya. Quincey of Quincey Eyewear agrees: "Tints and coatings present an opportunity to offer additional benefit beyond the provision of just visual correction. Displaying the benefits of various lens treatments alongside the latest frames will help encourage interest," says John Quincey of Quincey Eyewear. ◆