

Optical Goods Retailing including Sunglasses - UK - February 2013

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"When retailers start discounting they grab market share, but continued use of the same tactics quickly becomes tired and less effective. In the future the best optical goods retailers need to use a more innovative range of techniques to inspire customers to buy."

— Jane Westgarth, Senior Market Analyst

In this report we answer the key questions:

- Is the 'special offer' culture here to stay?
- What impact will online shopping have on conventional opticians?
- How influential is style in driving demand for spectacles?
- Will people buy their glasses from a supermarket opticians?
- Is laser eyesight correction a threat to mainstream opticians?

There is little doubt that opticians have been finding the going tough in recent years as consumer demand has weakened in the face of the economic squeeze. An over-supplied market saw the merger of two of the 'big four' chains when [Dollond & Aitchison](#) and Boots joined forces in 2009. This has left the lion's share of retail distribution in the hands of a dominant 'big three': Specsavers, Boots and [Vision Express](#). Optical Express, the fourth largest optical chain, has rationalised in 2012, cutting store numbers by about a quarter, in a bid to shore up profitability in this difficult market place.

But life for opticians chains has been made even more competitive because of the rise of in-store opticians within Tesco and Asda. Although neither group has expanded as fast as they originally predicted, they continue to add new outlets and between them there are now around 265 supermarket opticians spread around the country. These enjoy the benefit of lower occupancy costs than standalone shops and can also offer the advantageous convenience of free parking, longer opening hours and powerful buying muscle. When a new one opens up in a town there are anxious marketing wars with local competitors, sparking a wave of discounting and deals such as free eye exams. If this competitive scene is not enough, there is a rise in availability of discount products online. Also, consumers may opt for laser eyesight correction instead of glasses or contact lenses and this now has an established and respected presence in the UK market place.

So, this is a market under stress and with flat demand, opticians are having to work harder to attract and retain customers. This report examines the market for optical goods retailing, identifying the key players and their survival strategies.

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This report is part of a series of reports, produced to provide you with a more holistic view of this market