

CANDID CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN VCPN'S ED DE GENNARO AND LEADING OPTICAL EXECUTIVES ABOUT THEIR PRODUCT STRATEGIES.



**This One-to-One exchange features GERARD SANTINELLI, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF SANTINELLI INTERNATIONAL.**

Gerard Santinelli joined Santinelli International in 1980 as marketing and sales director and was promoted to vice president/general manager in 1990. He has served as the company's president since 1998 and assumed the title of Chief Executive Officer in 2002. Here, Gerard discusses the importance of multitasking, automated, and user-friendly equipment to eyecare professionals (ECPs) and labs.

**Ed De Gennaro:** What trends do you see emerging in lens processing and how will your company keep up with them?

**Gerard Santinelli:** We need to address the retail/ECP and industrial/wholesale lab segments separately. We see a strong trend toward automation on the industrial lab side. With the high cost of labor and the requirement for higher efficiency and productivity, labs need to automate their finishing through robotics. This robotic equipment has to be seamless with the lab's software, and the equipment has to be robust, while

being user-friendly.

**EDG:** Are you producing a complete line of robotic equipment?

**GS:** Yes, and we envision our automated edging line going to even higher levels. We intend to truly push the envelope into some pretty impressive technology for labs.

On the ECP side, we see a continuing trend toward more multitasking equipment and more user-friendly equipment that guides the operator through the process.

As in many industries, the available pool for quality labor continues to shrink and turnover is a stark reality. ECPs therefore need automated equipment that multitasks, is easy-to-use, is intuitive, and guides the amateur as well as the expert operator through the process.

Our aim is to provide the ECP with finishing equipment that automates most finishing tasks and provides flawless results with little operator judgment.

**EDG:** What features are ECPs ask-

ing for in finishing equipment?

**GS:** In addition to multitasking features, ECPs are looking for a system that provides the basics but has expansion potential. And they're searching for very reliable equipment they can count on to do the job well for many years.

**EDG:** What's the most successful piece you're selling right now?

**GS:** We have an extensive product line for retail that ranges from very affordable entry level equipment to our sophisticated flagship ME-1000 Design+ multitasking edging system which drills, grooves, facets, and does many other great things.

Fewer people are interested in the entry level equipment and more go for the value-added, higher-end edgers. This is making our mid- to higher-end products our hottest and most successful pieces of equipment.

**EDG:** What's the reason for this?

**GS:** Our partnership with NIDEK, LTD. in Japan has resulted in advanced technology that ECPs recognize as the "Lexus" of optical equipment. We strive to help our clients "Perfect the Art Inside the Frame."

**EDG:** What is your biggest challenge in selling lab equipment?

**GS:** Ensuring that our customers are trained properly and equipped to utilize our equipment to its maximum potential. We don't just sell equipment, we provide consultation, advanced support, and service that allows our clients to maximize their investment.

For example, our salespeople and technicians properly install and cali-

brate the edger to the ECP's specifications. We then train the staff so that they have a complete understanding of the machine and we run some of their jobs as examples. Typically, we schedule a follow-up visit to review operations, answer questions, and offer advanced training.

We also offer and sponsor free seminars on different topics like lensometry and neutralizing lenses, mounting, adjusting, etc., and some of these seminars are ABO accredited. We know that many ECPs have requirements to maintain their licenses, so we want to help them with that. We strive to deliver useful, practical training; as industry leaders we see this as an important role and position for our company.

**EDG:** Any closing comments?

**GS:** I think it's important for ECPs to ask themselves the question, "to edge or not to edge?" This gives them control over the deliverable and over quality, and allows their dispensaries to truly expand. Profit is a key factor because there's no question that fabricating lenses in-house makes a practice more successful.

Optical professionals need to consider what type of equipment to invest in, where they can find the best value, and where to place their confidence. Buying low-end equipment doesn't necessarily represent value, it just represents inexpensive equipment. We believe other factors, such as finished lens quality, ease-of-use, equipment reliability, company longevity and stability, and service deliverables are more important than simply the initial equipment price. We are confident the market receives the best results and value outcome with us, and we will keep working hard to earn our clients' confidence and business. ■