Retail Innovation Shout Out: Warby Parker’s Innovative Take on an 800 Year Old Invention

by Sara Hesson

We don’t typically think of product innovation when we think of prescription eyeglasses – no matter how stylish they are. But “one-for-one” eyewear pioneer Warby Parker has changed the game entirely by making online prescription glasses sales easy, economical and fun. The team designs its own frames and sells them under its own brand for $95, which they are able to do by working directly with suppliers, avoiding licensing fees and retail markups by selling directly to consumers online. And at under $100 per pair, Warby Parker is disrupting prices in a low-tech but high-priced business, all while advancing a social mission; for every pair purchased, they donate a pair to someone in need.

The business has since opened several brick and mortar stores and showrooms across the U.S. to supplement warbyparker.com. Creativity and attention to detail in-store are noteworthy themes of Warby Parker retail locations, some of which are inspired by libraries and offer amenities from in-store optometrists to photo booths and small press books. The retail page of the site says it best: “Shopping for glasses is not an activity associated with goosebump-inducing delight. We want to change that. Our retail ideal is to create spaces that combine the snappy ease of online ordering with the fun and serendipity of real-life shopping.”

Warby Parker has recently seen a spike in sales and website traffic in response to its highly innovative annual report, which is refreshingly transparent and equally comical.

We applaud Warby Parker’s ability to turn the tired, markup-heavy business model of corrective eyewear retail upside down, while also giving the customer intrinsic value associated with helping those in need.

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