

The new optician - views from Hans Anders

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The white coats have been gone for some time and slowly but surely, the optician is moving towards the role of fashion retailer. What does this mean from a personnel policy aspect? We discuss this with Esther Bodde, HR Director of the optical retail chain.

‘Don’t have me minding the shop, have me overhaul the shop.’ This one-liner succinctly summarises the career of HR professional Esther Bodde. She has seen different markets over the past 25 years and three years ago, she made the seemingly striking switch from flowers (FloraHolland) to spectacles. The common thread in every one of her roles: building and shaping transformations. Her role at Hans Anders is no different. ‘My task is to make the employee journey more pleasant. Which in turn will enhance the customer journey.’

Owner 3i gave Bodde and her fellow board members an unambiguous task: inject the original character of Hans Anders back into the shop. The formula started in 1982 at a small shop in Rotterdam with a disruptive ideology: high-quality glasses, affordable for everyone. ‘This elan should be brought back for the customer of today,’ says Bodde. Customers demand more and more. ‘They are no longer patients, but genuine consumers. This means we have to create a combination of expert eye measurements on the one hand and a retail experience on the other.’

To stimulate this change, Hans Anders is working with Summa College in Eindhoven to start new professional training for opticians. Here, students not only learn the optometry discipline, they also learn the intricacies of contemporary retail trade. Hans Anders is confident that the training is optimally aligned with what opticians need today and in the future to help their customers see well and look good.

What does this optician 2.0 approach mean specifically? ‘That the customer experience is the same everywhere,’ says Bodde by way of example. The branches are very diverse, from sole proprietorships to very large shops. From welcoming the customer to the eye measurement and finally the sales transaction: everything should be drenched in the same familiar Hans Anders flavour. This also means that accessibility is very important. ‘The optician must use plain, jargon-less language to guide the customer along the process, and explain what we do,’ says Bodde. It’s not just about emphasising the technical aspect. ‘It only creates distance. We want to customer to lean in closer, we want to give them the feeling that Hans Anders genuinely sees them.’

A course that is more focused on retail and consumers might suggest a more commercial approach. ‘Cross-selling and upselling are not objectives per se,’ Bodde stresses. She does hint that it could be a beneficial side effect. ‘It is commercially smart to delight customers, because this leads to return visits and recommendations to others. When you listen to a customer properly, results will follow.’



While the optometry part of the conversation should be primarily understandable and accessible, another part of the conversation is gaining in importance: the fashion side. Not only do people want to see well, they also want to look good. ‘This means employees have to ask more questions,’ explains Bodde. ‘About the style of clothing in the customer’s wardrobe, for example.’

This more fashionable approach is reminiscent of relatively new players such as Ace & Tate and Charlie Temple, who have used this as their foundation for building blocks right from the start. But according to Bodde, there is one significant difference. ‘One in three Dutch spectacle wearers have Hans Anders glasses balancing on their noses. So, we need to appeal to the entire nation. With more contemporary frames, as well as the traditional ones.’

Bodde is convinced that training a new generation of opticians is undoubtedly worth the time, effort, and money. Every five years, the optical industry is assessed on numerous aspects and for both expertise and advice, Hans Anders has improved significantly, according to the HR director. It is expected that even better training will improve these figures. ‘That is what you want to achieve. The investment is more or less irrelevant.’

ABOUT HANS ANDERS

Hans Anders is de één van de bekendste optische retailers en volume-marktleider in Nederland en België. De keten maakt **oog- en hoorzorg** van goede kwaliteit betaalbaar voor iedereen. De keten is opgericht in 1982 en is een toonaangevende, **value-for-money** retailer met meer dan 400 winkels in Nederland en België.

40 jaar geleden transformeerde Hans Anders de optieksector in Nederland door het radicaal anders te doen en kwaliteitsbrillen voor verbazend lage prijzen te introduceren. Het bedrijf veroorzaakte daarmee een revolutie in de brillenmarkt. Tegenwoordig biedt Hans Anders een scala aan private label en merkbrillen, hoortoestellen, contactlenzen en zonnebrillen van hoge kwaliteit en vakkundige oog- en hoorzorg; nog altijd tegen de beste prijzen in de markt.

Maar liefst één op de drie brillen in Nederland en België is gekocht bij Hans Anders. Het bedrijf was én is toonaangevend in propositie ontwikkeling: het aanbieden van hoortoestellen naast brillen en lenzen, het unieke Bril Totaal Plan, de eerste brillen webshop. Anno 2021 is Hans Anders koploper in digitalisering en omnichannel-retail. Zo houdt Hans Anders zijn disruptieve heritage met méér dan 400 winkels in Nederland en België springlevend.



Hans Anders