

February 2021

Pro Optik goes online, plans to add 200 stores by 2025

Pro Optik, a German optical retail chain with about 150 stores, opened its first e-commerce website in January, offering direct purchase and delivery for most of its ranges as well as live consultations with opticians. Products offered online include single vision glasses, sunglasses, contact lenses and eye care products. For glasses equipped with progressive lenses, sports glasses and industrial glasses, customers are invited to visit its stores.

According to the company, it is the first time that a German optical chain offers live advice from qualified opticians online as other services tend to use AI solutions to guide consumers on their website instead. When visitors on Pro Optik's new website need support with their purchase, the system reroutes their internet calls to a qualified optician in one of the group's own stores in Germany, with orders being completed online, processed at the company's headquarters and then shipped directly to the client.

Micha Siebenhandl, the company's CEO since March 2020, told us that the investment in the new website, which also integrates a virtual try-on system, was in the six-digit range but he declined to mention a target figure for the online business as a percentage of the group's total revenues, due to the unpredictability of the pandemic's evolution in the next months.

Pro Optik, which was taken over in August 2019 by **Paragon Partners**, a Munich-based investment fund, ranks third in the German optical retail market with external sales of €128 million in 2019, behind **Fielmann** and **GrandVision's Apollo** with revenues of €1,190 million and an estimated €770 million, respectively.

The Wedlingen-based company, which also sells hearing aids, mostly targets the entry-level segment of the market with private label products accounting for 72 percent of its revenues. In this area, the company recently launched "pro glas by Rodenstock", an exclusive brand of lenses in partnership with **Rodenstock**, and its own range of sunglasses in collaboration with **Franziska Knuppe**, a German fashion model and actress.

Pro Optik's network currently consists of 151 optical shops, including 13 directly owned operations, 56 joint ventures and 82 franchised stores but the company plans to open another 200 new stores by 2025, which would more than double its size. Siebenhandl told us that growth would not only come from store acquisitions but also from partnerships with independent opticians opening Pro Optik franchised stores, on top of their traditional businesses, thus extending their presence to the lower-priced segment of the market and tapping into new consumer groups.

Siebenhandl also pointed out that the group would significantly increase its communication investments in the future in order to raise Pro Optik's brand awareness among all consumer groups.