

# Sunglasses Retailer Delivers Interactive Shopping Experience Through Touch Technology

Case Study: N3L Optics

## Profile

N3L Optics, a retail subsidiary of sunglasses-maker Oakley, launched its first high-tech, sport performance sunglass store in Denver, Colorado in May 2008. The retail stores are one-of-a-kind, offering several interactive stations for customers, including: an RFID-enabled Smart Mirror, which instantly identifies the sunglass that a customer is wearing and shows product features and performance specifications; the Explorer Chamber, an environmental simulator that allows customers to test a specific sunglass under varying light and airflow conditions; and the Newton Immersive Display, which allows customers to search product features and lens classifications from leading eyewear manufacturers. N3L (Newton's 3 Laws of Motion) sells 21 brands of glasses and currently has locations in El Paso, TX, Orlando, FL, San Mateo, CA, and Dallas, TX, with plans for two more locations by the end of 2009.



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## Challenge

When Oakley CEO Scott Olivet and Oakley President Colin Baden got together a few years ago to discuss the next evolution of its retail experience, they sought to create an environment which took advantage of innovative, interactive technology in a contemporary environment. “We wanted a setting which catered to men but didn’t alienate women,” explains Olivet in a company video. The store was designed to make it easy for customers to locate appropriate products: sunglasses are organized by sport and also by performance, such as the “extreme zone” and the “polarized zone.”

The goal: help consumers make the best decision about their sunglasses purchase, in a way that is both informative and engaging. Adds Kendra Reichenau, Senior VP-Brand Director for N3L Optics: “We wanted an interactive experience to help customers see the performance of the lens while they’re in the store.” Ultimately, Oakley and N3L executives hoped that customers would not only be more successful in their product search but also, have fun in the process.

## Solution

As one of the store’s three central features, the Newton Immersive Display is a 46-inch touch screen display that serves as an aesthetically-pleasing search tool for customers. Provided by Horizon Display, a Lake Forest, California-based provider of large-format touch screen displays, the Newton system allows a customer to select certain parameters and performance requirements which then display the best-matched lenses and brands right on the screen.

“Touch is great for self-education and it’s very intuitive,” Reichenau says, explaining why the company wanted a touch-based solution. “You need lots of visual interaction when you’re buying sunglasses.” As well, N3L Optics desired to give customers the option to conduct their own product search without needing to ask a sales clerk for help. Finally, the touch solution fits in well with the overall theme of the store: “Movement has everything to do with the concept,” Olivet explains in the video.





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## NextWindow Touch Screen Technology

The technology behind the Newton Immersive Displays was developed by NextWindow, a New Zealand-based manufacturer of optical touch screen technology for displays ranging in size from 15 to 120 inches. Optical technology incorporates sensors in the corners of the screen, and has distinct performance advantages compared with other touch technologies which require a firm touch and tend to degrade more quickly.

“When taking on a project as cutting edge as the N3L project, we knew we had to use a technology that was just as cutting edge,” says Dave Colley, VP of Display Solutions with Horizon Display. “When you have optics in the name of your brand, the in-store experience has to be optically superior. NextWindow’s optical touch technology worked seamlessly with the demanding high performance software developed by N3L and the aesthetics are unparalleled in the touch screen market.”





## Benefits

So far, Reichenau says that senior management at N3L Optics is pleased with the results of the Newton displays and the store concept.

"We have good indicators of success so far and overall we feel very positive... it's important for your performance to have a quality sunglass lens and a good fit. I think with the technology and the high level of sales training we are accomplishing that for customers."

For the near term, she says that the company is gaining market share and growing the N3L brand; longer-term, she expects a boost in profitability as well. What will be instrumental for long-term success of the stores is tweaking the technology for the optimal user experience. In that regard, N3L Optics ran focus groups in the spring of 2009, which indicated the need for a minor redesign of the touch-based application (the software was developed by Wirestone, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner). "We want to tighten the application and reduce the amount of touches needed to get to the information." Reichenau says that N3L Optics plans to open more stores in 2010.

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