

CE Credit - Topic Review

From Dr. Google to Your Exam Lane: What Search Trends Reveal About Contact Lens Patients

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ABSTRACT

Patients are turning to digital platforms including search engines, AI assistants, and social media more than ever to learn about contact lenses. The Contact Lens Institute's Digital Discovery report captures thousands of search behaviors and rising concerns across North America. This article synthesizes CLI's findings for clinical optometrists and translates them into actionable insights for patient communication, prescribing, and business growth. Topics include cost sensitivities, online purchase intent, wear and care challenges, and voice search optimization. The paper emphasizes opportunities to build patient trust, promote healthier wear habits, and strengthen in-office contact lens retention strategies in the age of Dr. Google.

INTRODUCTION

The way patients access information about their vision care needs is shifting rapidly. With more than 99,000 online searches occurring every second globally, many patients are consulting the internet about contact lenses before, during, and after their visits to the optometrist¹. According to data, 99.5% of users never go beyond the first page of results, and half click on a result within just 9 seconds⁴. As noted in the Contact Lens Institute's (CLI) 2025 Digital Discovery report, today's 'Dr. Google' inquiries offer critical insights into what patients are curious or confused about, long before they voice those questions in person.

With the emergence of more advanced digital tools, such as generative AI, it should be expected that patients will continue to turn to online sources to do their research. However, data shows that there are many gaps left in the information provided through these sources. These gaps are opportunities for eye care practitioners (ECPs) to continue to establish themselves as the trusted authority in this space. This article will explore how search trends can inform our clinical and communication strategies.

The CLI report collected search data from Google Trends, auto-complete queries, TikTok searches, and voice assistant responses between April 2024 and April 2025. The dataset spanned thousands of U.S. and Canadian searches, with

supplemental analysis of AI platforms and social media commentary. A panel of optometrists and opticians from both countries interpreted the results and provided clinical commentary .

PURCHASING INTENT AND PRICING QUESTIONS

The CLI report shows that 65% of contact lens-related Google searches are related to purchasing—whether price, product comparisons, or specific retailers^{1,5}. Patients often anchor their expectations around what they see online, which may not reflect the full cost-benefit equation of purchasing through an ECP. Practitioners are encouraged to preemptively discuss pricing, rebates, and convenience advantages during the patient visit.

Clinics can benefit by introducing box pricing after rebates, using software tools to calculate insurance benefits, and training staff to present the total cost in context.

Going beyond price by discussing the value a practice can provide in addition to being competitive on price can sway patients' purchasing decisions. Value propositions such as offering direct shipping, simplifying returns and exchanges, providing back up lenses, and other forms of personalized support to patients can help reconcile differences in cost.

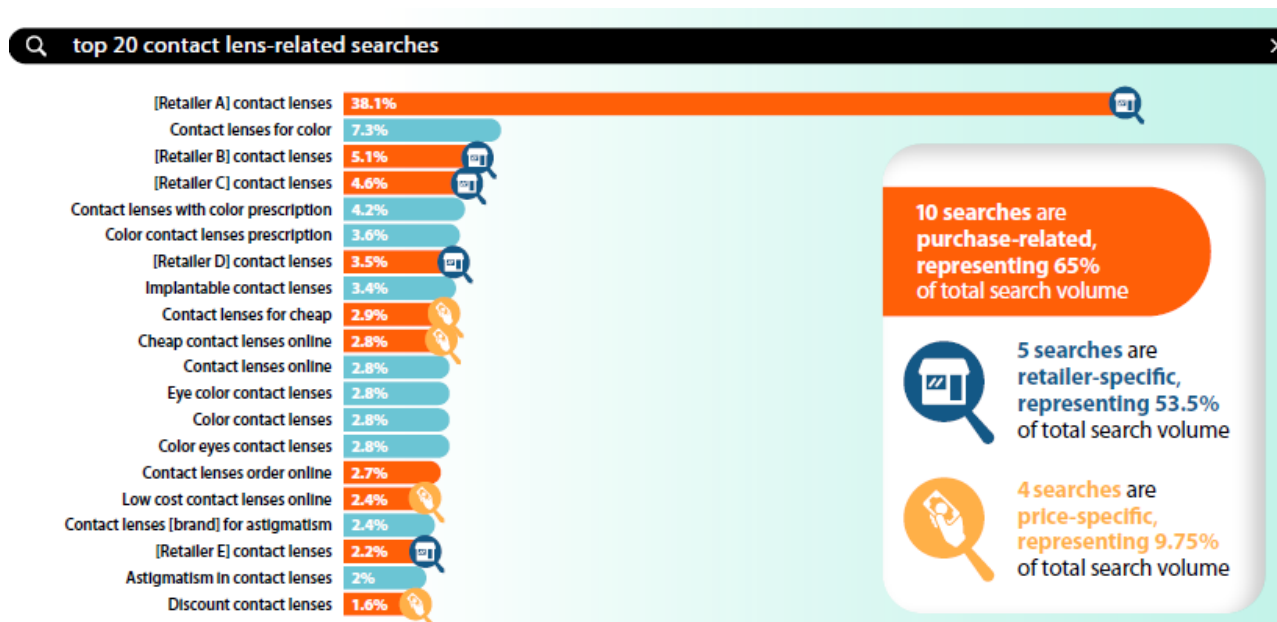


Figure 1. The most common contact lens-related Google searches in the U.S. and Canada.¹

After the initial purchase, utilizing software that will send automated reminders and allow patients to purchase online will save them time and reduce the likelihood of them looking for an online provider when it's time to purchase their new supply of lenses.

SEARCHES REFLECTING WEAR & CARE GAPS

A striking data point in the report shows that searches about how to remove contact lenses significantly outpace searches about insertion. In fact, 'how to remove contact lenses' accounted for 61% of 'how' queries across platforms¹. The CLI Disrupting Dropout report found that 63% of new wearers identified insertion and removal confidence as a key to continued wear⁵.

I&R (insertion & removal) education, especially removal techniques, which may be neglected during rushed fittings. Tools such as printed guides, videos, and structured post-fit check-ins can make a big difference in reducing wearer frustration and dropout.

Video content can be particularly valuable, given the propensity for patients to turn to online sources for education. Sending a video link to a patient via text or email that clearly describes the process of insertion and removal can save the patient the risk and trouble of searching through less trustworthy content online.

UNDERSTANDING DUAL WEAR OPPORTUNITIES

Search behavior reveals a false perception that patients must choose between contact lenses and glasses. CLI notes that only 6% of comparative searches used the conjunction 'and' while 94% used 'or' or 'versus'¹. This either-or mindset limits adoption of dual wear, where patients use both modalities depending on activity, season, or lifestyle needs.

Clinicians should look for 'life moment' cues—vacation, sports, weddings—to introduce the benefits of having both glasses and contacts.

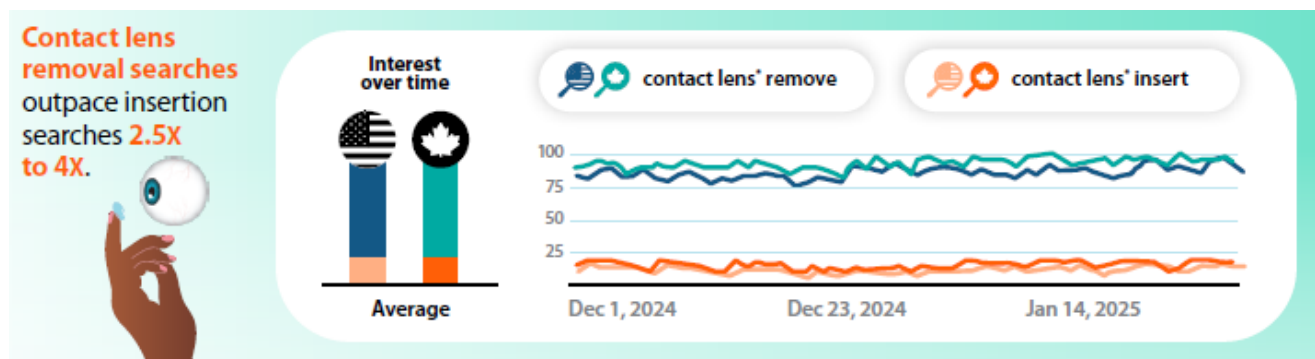


Figure 2. Contact Lens Removal Searches¹This discrepancy underscores a need to reinforce

A basic rule of thumb for increasing awareness around dual wear opportunities is to simply ask everyone about their interest in wearing one modality or the other. Asking questions like “have you ever thought of trying contact lenses?”, or “are there times when you wish you didn’t have to wear your glasses?”, can elicit discussions that patients may not have planned to have.

Patients who are new to contact lenses will often have initial mental hurdles such as fear of insertion/removal or the cost of purchasing. Some of these concerns can be overcome by offering free in-office trials in which the doctor inserts the lenses, allows the patient to spend time in the optical with the lenses, and then removes them before the patient leaves. This allows the patient to have a realistic experience with contact lenses and it also builds trust with the practitioner.

DIGITAL DISCOVERABILITY AND VOICE SEARCH

Patients increasingly rely on AI platforms and smart speakers to find vision care advice. Nearly half of North Americans have used generative AI to search for health care advice^{2,3}. The CLI report found that up to 20% of searches are now voice-driven¹. Terms like ‘eye doctor near me’ dominate, suggesting that optimization for mobile, voice, and local search is essential.

Using location-based keywords, updating Google Business profiles, and including ‘eye doctor’ as a descriptor can help practices rise in search results and attract new contact lens wearers.

Understanding how search engines and other online tools gather information and rank websites can be invaluable for brick-and-mortar businesses who are hoping to be discovered online. Businesses are encouraged to increase the amount of high-quality content on a website by creating individual pages dedicated to different services and specialties they offer, by writing blogs, and by adding video content. It is important to use key words and phrases that highlight the products and services that are sold and the location of the business throughout the website’s content.

Google’s AI assistant, Gemini, now provides a summary of the search results at the very top of the page, which will often prevent those who are searching from scrolling down to click website links. While this can be a disadvantage for many businesses hoping to be found in the search (even on the first page), it can be advantageous to those who have taken the time to establish themselves as authorities in the geographical area of the search. Similar to asking ChatGPT “who/where is the best optometrist?”, Gemini will also sometimes rank the businesses it deems to be the most suited to the query while also giving explanation as to why it is providing those results.

ADDRESSING SEARCH-DRIVEN MISINFORMATION

Search engines and AI tools are trusted by patients but often deliver outdated or incomplete information. Platforms like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Copilot may reference non-clinical sources, or omit nuances around wear schedules, material differences, and hygiene. Clinicians can counter this by asking patients if they’ve looked online and gently offering context and corrections.

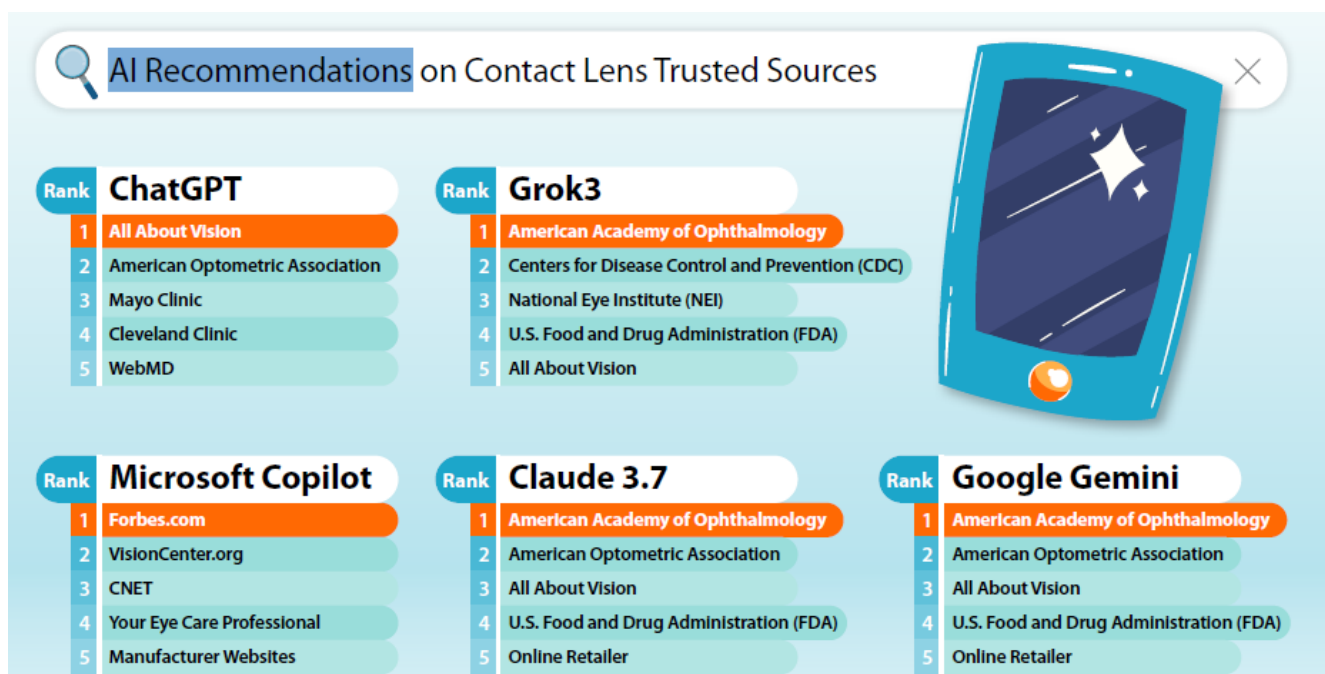


Figure 3. AI recommendations on Contact Lens Trusted Sources¹

The Contact Lens Institute's Digital Discovery report evaluated which sources a handful of AI platforms (ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, Grok3, and Claude 3.7) trust for contact lens information by asking the question "Where can I get more information about contact lenses? List the top 5". While most the platforms did list reputable sources such as the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the American Optometric Association, some listed sources that ECPs would not likely refer to as one of their top 5 sources for contact lens information. In particular, Copilot listed Forbes.com as its number 1 recommendation.

CLI recommends explicitly inviting patients to bring up anything they've read or seen online. Taking the time to have the discussion with patients versus simply dismissing these sources will help reinforce the clinician's role as the trusted source.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 CLI Digital Discovery report provides a roadmap for understanding the modern contact lens patient through their search behaviors. These insights empower optometrists to bridge communication gaps, better support wear and care, and reframe buying conversations.

Educational content is far more accessible than it has ever been, and patients are becoming more comfortable with researching medical topics on a variety of online sources. Optometrists who can leverage these platforms by viewing these digital landscapes as virtual extensions of their physical office will have an opportunity to meet patients where they are and elevate the service they provide.

With proactive education, dual wear advocacy, and improved digital discoverability, ECPs can enhance satisfaction, boost long-term wear, and solidify their role as the go-to resource in an AI-powered world.

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