
NEWS

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U.K. TO BE FIRST OFFSHORE EXPANSION

FOR AUSTRALIAN OPTICAL MARKETER

The United Kingdom is to be the international launch pad for an Australian optical marketing group whose innovative approach to retail shop-front operations for optometrists is being unwound over Australia's 1,500 independent practitioners.

The trial overseas expansion, announced today by Perth-based C @ Limited (pron: "see at") comes less than three months after the Company's successful \$2.5 million capital raising and debut in December last year on the ASX.

"We will undertake a pilot scheme in the UK from mid year because our marketing package and linked lens and frame ordering system is as applicable in the UK as it is in Australia," C@'s Managing Director, Mr Andrew Gay, said today.

"Independent optical practices in the UK face a similar situation to their Australian counterparts - difficulty competing with large chain stores, including in the UK for example, Specsavers, which commands 36% of that country's market.

"Importantly, the trial will focus on how well our exclusive ranges are suited to the UK market and how quickly a UK-placed order can be turned around through our laboratory in Perth and shipped back to the British customer," Mr Gay said.

"We are targeting two days.

"If UK independents show the same enthusiasm as their Australian counterparts, we would mirror our Australian operations by setting up a dedicated production facility in the UK."

C@ is currently installing in East Perth, one of Australia's most modern optical lens laboratories. It includes the latest robotic technology from Germany able to cut and shape a lens from a plastic optical blank, within 90 seconds.

"Our eventual UK target, like that in Australia, is the thousands of optical practices not linked to a national brand chain and which struggle to market their services against the weight of the big brand operators prominent in high street locations," Mr Gay said.

“If the trial is successful, the rollout cost is minimal while value adding, again with no additional cost, to the production and revenue streams through our new East Perth facility.

“It will also allow British independent practices to eventually access C@’s state-of-the-art lenses and frames, sunglasses and contact lenses, and more importantly national marketing which will drive more clients through their doors.”

C@’s marketing plan allows Australian practitioners to brand their stores with the Company’s colours as long as they order a specific volume of frames and lenses through the East Perth laboratory.

The plan does not impose the restrictive practices and costs of a franchise – but outlets benefit from having their “brand” advertised nationally.

C@ is initially offering its Australian pilot stores access to more than 330 frames including 11 of its own brands covering premium through to trendy and budget styles.

The Company’s East Perth laboratory is expected to be fully commissioned by mid-year after a two-stage start-up, supplying stock lenses, bifocals and multifocals.

C@ is also in advanced negotiations with Australian health funds on potential benefit terms for C@ customers.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Andrew Gay
C @ Limited
Aust (08) 9328 3311
0439 938 491

Kevin Skinner
Field Public Relations
(08) 8234 9555
0414 822 631