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From equipment to process: A&R at the 2026 Lab Leadership Forum

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That was the thread through the 2026 Lab Leadership Forum, held September 16–18 at the M Resort Spa Casino in Henderson, Nevada. The Vision Council's sold-out gathering brought more than 200 independent lab leaders together for three days of panels, networking, and a direct look at what is shaping the lab floor.

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A&R Optical Machinery was represented by Robert Kohn, President, North America, on the Equipment Panel alongside Kurt Atchison of Schneider, Rich Hughes of Satisloh, Roy Rosales of MEI, and Jason Frank of Coburn Technologies.

Mr. Kohn focused on big data: using inspection results in A&R's Statistical Process Control (SPC) and Key Performance Indicator (KPI) dashboards to move a lab from catching defects to predicting them.

What we brought to the discussion

A Mapper can tell a lab whether a lens passed. A connected Mapper can tell a lab what is about to drift.

- Big data only helps if it is tied to the job. Power, mapping, and cosmetic results need to sit with the order, the product and the line, not in a separate report.
- KPIs make the signal usable. A production lead and a customer-service lead should be looking at the same picture: yield, redo rate, where the misses cluster, and whether the line is holding.
- SPC turns that history into a signal. Trend, range, and out-of-control points show a process moving off standard before the reject bin fills up.
- Predictive production management is the point. The goal is not a larger archive. It is an earlier decision: adjust the process, hold a product, or intervene before the shift ends.

For predictive production management, A&R and Satisloh bring together complementary specialist expertise in equipment, accurate lens inspection and process knowledge, helping labs turn production data into actionable insight.

Automation pays off when it gives the lab that control, not just another station on the conveyor.

What it means for optical labs

Independent labs are balancing tighter turnaround, higher free-form complexity, and customers who expect fewer surprises. Inspection at the end of the line still matters. Inspection that feeds SPC and a live KPI view matters more, because the lab can see the drift while it can still correct it.

That is the standard we hold our own work to. A NeoMapper earns its place when the lab can see the job, trust the result, and use the data to run the next hour, not just audit the last one.

Closing

Forums like this are useful because the people who run the labs are in the room. It is a chance to compare notes on where the process is breaking down, and on whether the data coming off the equipment is actually helping anyone manage it.

Thank you to The Vision Council for bringing the lab community together, and to the other panelists for a direct and practical discussion.

A&R has spent more than four decades beside optical labs. The equipment changes. The job does not: make the process more certain.



ROBB KOHN
A&R President, North America

