



NewsMaker—EssilorLuxottica’s Fabrizio Uguzzoni reflects on “innovation as a driving force” in an exclusive *Vision Monday* interview. —16

#MIW02026

Congratulations to the 2026 ‘Class’ of VM’s Most Influential Women in Optical



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This Spring, the *Vision Monday* editorial team is as thrilled as always to bring you the 24th edition of our annual Most Influential Women in Optical feature. Each year, this initiative gives us the opportunity to get to know impactful women from all across the optical industry: doctors, opticians, retail masterminds, marketing geniuses, teachers, sales mavens and so much more. We get to learn about these women from their nominators, who are often the people who they've impacted the most, and from the honorees themselves, painting a unique picture of these outstanding women, which we then share with you, our readers.

This issue presents a class of 35 brilliant women, honored in five categories that showcase the work they do and the impact they've made: Executive Suite, Rising Stars, Mentors, Innovators and Above & Beyond. In the following pages, you will get to meet these women, too, and hear from them and their nominators. Each honoree profile presents a compel-

ling, inspiring story that showcases the power of women in their workplaces and beyond. Our editorial team feels exceedingly lucky to hear these stories firsthand, and even more privileged to share them with you.

As always, we hope you enjoy learning about these remarkable members of our community and seeing how they've positively impacted our industry with their work ethic, their thoughtfulness, their innovations and more. Alongside that, we hope this issue and these women's stories inspire you to take your own risks, to make that phone call, pitch that product idea, apply for that new position. You never know what could go right—and next year you could even find yourself in the pages of this feature.

Congratulations to the 2026 class of *Vision Monday's* Most Influential Women in Optical. Here's to celebrating many more years of powerful women. ■

A&R Team celebrates

Sandra Fonticoli

SALES & MARKETING
DIRECTOR

Honored as one of 2026
Most Influential Women in
the Optical Industry
— Innovators Category —



Innovating vision. Inspiring leadership.

WOMEN WHO HAVE INITIATED NEW PRODUCTS, PROGRAMS OR IDEAS MARKING SUCCESS

Laura Brown

SENIOR MARKETING DIRECTOR

Vision Source & Essilor Doctor Alliances

Kingwood, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Leading a unified marketing strategy for a diverse network of fiercely independent and entrepreneurial private practice owners requires innovation. Under Laura’s leadership, Vision Source launched and is successfully executing the innovative ‘Beyond Your Eyes’ patient marketing campaign.”



Laura Brown has seven years of experience in the optical industry and 28 years of marketing experience overall. She holds a bachelor of business administration in marketing from Stephen F. Austin State University.

At Vision Source, she oversees practice marketing support, national brand development, B2B initiatives, and turn-key marketing solutions to help practices retain and grow their patient base; she has implemented streamlined design and digital marketing platforms to help member practices market themselves. In 2024, Brown said she played a key role, alongside many partners, in launching the national “Beyond Your Eyes” consumer cam-

paign, which emphasized comprehensive eye exams by independent ODs and has generated more than 130 million impressions across the U.S.

“I’m inspired every day by the Vision Source culture—our colleagues, doctor leaders, and members truly feel like family,” she said. “I see firsthand how our ODs change lives by helping people see more clearly and by building deep, meaningful relationships with their patients. Being even a small part of that impact is incredibly motivating.”

As a marketer, she noted that she finds it is rare and special to do work she genuinely believes in, work that supports people who make a real difference in their communities. “That sense of purpose is what inspires me and keeps me passionate about this profession.”

Brown credits several influential female coworkers and leaders throughout her career for her success, adding that their “guidance, support and example have played a huge role in who I am professionally, and it’s hard to name just a few because each has contributed in meaningful ways.”

With Vision Source being founded in her local community, Brown saw the opportunity to apply her marketing experience to a company that serves her own community as an ideal alignment of purpose and place. “By empowering practices to tell their stories more effectively, I’ve been able to contribute to both their growth and the broader visibility of the high-quality care our network provides,” she said.

“My advice to women exploring a career in the optical industry is simply this: be open to it—because it’s an

incredibly fulfilling field. Once you step into this industry, you quickly realize how meaningful the work truly is. Knowing that what you do helps support doctors who transform lives every day brings a deep sense of purpose.”

SHE SAYS... “Great care changes lives—and supporting those who provide it is the greatest privilege.”

Sandra Fonticoli

SALES AND MARKETING DIRECTOR

Automation & Robotics SA

Verviers, Belgium

CHOSEN BECAUSE... “Sandra serves as the strategic link between the ophthalmic lens sector and the company’s R&D teams, ensuring that innovation is driven by real-world customer needs, industry trends, and operational realities. Discreet yet highly influential, she plays a pivotal role in defining the company’s innovation roadmap and reinforcing its position as a technology leader in this specialized market.”



Sandra Fonticoli entered the optical industry by chance as part of her studies in international trade more than three decades ago. As sales

and marketing director at Automation & Robotics SA, she has become a key interface between customer needs and the company’s development and service team.

She said the company’s evolution from a family-owned business to a larger global entity has allowed her to take on new challenges in her role. “As the company grew, my role gradually evolved toward a stronger commercial focus, and I quickly assumed responsibility for the European market. This step proved decisive, as it gave real meaning to my career,” she said. “It also opens the door to exciting new challenges—ones I am fully ready to embrace, while continuing to place our customers at the heart of everything we do.”

In the wake of global events such as the pandemic and a components shortage, Fonticoli said her focus has been on maintaining customer trust by ensuring transparency, proximity, and continuity, which helps the company in terms of cost control, quality standards, and delivery commitments. She noted the recent acquisition by EssilorLuxottica has further expanded her scope of responsibilities, adding what she calls a strong strategic dimension to her role.

“In an increasingly complex and fast-evolving environment, sustainable success depends on clear direction and solid execution. By leveraging our teams’ expertise, anticipating market shifts, and listening closely to our customers, I did my utmost to guide the evolution of our product portfolio to meet the future needs of the ophthalmic industry,” she said.

WOMEN WHO HAVE INITIATED NEW PRODUCTS, PROGRAMS OR IDEAS MARKING SUCCESS

Fonticoli draws inspiration from her ability to anticipate customer needs and emerging market trends, translating them into actionable insights for the company's development team. She also attributes her success to several colleagues, like Christian Closset, founder of Automation & Robotics; Laurent Provost, CEO of Automation & Robotics; and Robert Kohn, president of the company's U.S. subsidiary.

Fonticoli believes she differentiates herself from others in the industry through her inclusive leadership style, grounded in open listening, respect for diverse viewpoints, and decision-making that is free from prejudice or ego.

"What may sometimes be perceived as a weakness has, over time, proven to be a real strength. It has, I believe, provided a foundation for trust, long-term relationships, and effective collaboration both within the company and with the customers," she said, adding she strongly believes that meaningful progress comes from connecting people and valuing their complementary skill sets. "I believe I have played a role in facilitating a culture that embodies this approach."

SHE SAYS... "True progress emerges at the crossroads where people, vision and action meet."

Cherie Gifford

**SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER,
BRAND AND COMMUNICATIONS**
[Hoya Vision Care](#)
Dallas, Texas

CHOSEN BECAUSE... "Her strategic vision has elevated Hoya's communications into a powerful tool for connection, education and growth, shaping how eyecare professionals and the optical industry perceive Hoya's market leadership while fostering a culture of innovation."

Cherie Gifford's path into optical began with a friend's encouragement and a leap of faith. Nearly a decade ago, knowing nothing about the industry,



Watch a video by Cherie Gifford.

she took a chance on an open role at Essilor. "Once I joined the team, everything changed," she said. "I quickly discovered how meaningful this industry truly is."

After briefly stepping away to explore other opportunities, she learned what many in optical already knew: once the industry gets into your blood, it never

More →

CONGRATULATIONS!

Karen Michaelson

ABOC
Rimmel Eyewear Manager, USA



Rimmel
E Y E W E A R

Rimmel Eyewear proudly honors your recognition as one of the 2026 *Most Influential Women in Optical* as a Rising Star honoree. True leadership is measured not only by achievement, but by the lives you influence along the way. Your dedication to learning, mentoring, and lifting others forward reflects the legacy that strengthens our profession and shapes its future. Keep guiding. Keep inspiring. Keep making a difference as your impact will be felt for generations to come.