

“Glasses need to be offered then and there because that ‘aha’ moment has just happened”: Ankur Sanghai of The/Nudge Institute on why immediacy drives sales and adoption of near-vision glasses

Rollo Romig

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Rollo Romig: I'm very interested in the bifocals. We haven't seen that elsewhere. Every other country we've looked at is just doing single-lens glasses. It's such an interesting solution to the problem of people having to take their glasses on and off. When did you start with the bifocals? Whose idea was that, and how long have you been doing both bifocals and single-lens glasses?

Ankur Sanghai: I first came to know about the existence of bifocals when I myself underwent training for a full refraction and correction. Bifocals have a clean lens on the upper part and a reading lens on the bottom part. It sounded very interesting, but I also never heard of bifocals distributed in camps or in other models, so I didn't focus too much on it. Then I started my pilots in Uttar Pradesh, and sales were not meeting the levels I wanted, but at the same time, it was a new pilot. We were having issues with identifying entrepreneurs, and other challenges.


But if I started looking at the major ones, one feedback through my entrepreneurs and coordinators on ground was that people were still not feeling comfortable about buying something which they have to use only for some particular activities. While they are doing that activity, also, they are reading something, and somebody comes to the door, and they have to look at that person. They can't even look at that person without either taking their glasses off, or putting it on their nose.

↗ It was a big concern which started getting relayed to me. People didn't want something which they have to take out and wear, on and off, all the time. Keeping it on their nose was a no-go for most people. It's very odd to just think about it and to picture oneself. People didn't even think about keeping it on their nose, and working like that.

Maybe for tailors it will work, because their work is like this, so they might be comfortable, but the general population is already opposed to it. Some beneficiaries knew about the existence of bifocals. They also relayed to me that some customers actually asked if we have bifocals. They learned about it maybe because they already had an existing pair a couple of years back, which they got in a camp or in a hospital. With this information, I felt it was time for trying out bifocals as well. When I got the next batch of bifocals, I sent it to Uttar Pradesh, and the sales started increasing.

In that context, sales were still not up to the mark because of different reasons. We also had to identify how to hire good entrepreneurs, et cetera, but at least this problem was resolved. That's how I moved to bifocals, and then once I started Tamil Nadu, I started getting more feedback that bifocals are what they desire. Another issue in Tamil Nadu was that when they were wearing reading glasses and they saw someone in the distance, they got scared because it was blurry, although everything was fine with their distance vision. Tamil Nadu verified all our concerns and findings initially, so that's how we moved to bifocals.

Rollo Romig: What percentage of the glasses are bifocals?

 **Ankur Sanghai:** Almost 80% to 90% of the sales we do are bifocals. The 10% to 20% which are single reading glasses are mostly bought by these people such as tailors with specific professions where they need single reading lenses only. Second is also people who may have complicated eye problems. By complicated, I mean not the level of complications, but for those who also have other issues for which they have to see a doctor or an optometrist, and at the same time, they also have near vision issues for which they need reading glasses. For them, they get reading glasses only.

It was a little surprising to me, honestly. I'm very new to this world. I was surprised how we found it so quickly, and why this is not the norm.

Rollo Romig: This is a challenge, for all the reasons you mentioned. With single lens glasses, when you have to take them off, there's such a high chance that you'll forget to bring them with you, or you lose or break them. I didn't know there were glasses with plain lenses on top, bifocals.

Ankur Sanghai: It's called plano bifocals. Also, most models are freely distributed through camps or door-to-door. It's a one-sided communication where the camp organizer or the donating philanthropist has heard that you have filled your prescription list, so now, here are your glasses. This was the first model where there was two-way communication, because the customer beneficiary had to decide what's best for them.

Rollo Romig: They had made a choice, and since they're paying, they say this isn't quite what they want. You don't want to say that about a free thing. You're supposed to be grateful.


Ankur Sanghai: Yes. Maybe that's the reason.

Rollo Romig: Or maybe they were just being polite, or just accepted that this is what they're giving out.


Ankur Sanghai: Exactly. It's not something you question. What you get, you just get.

Rollo Romig: That's definitely another argument for the entrepreneurial approach, the fact that you can get feedback from people, and change what you're doing as you build. Tell me more about your supply. Who are you getting the glasses from, and how do you make those decisions?

Ankur Sanghai: For us, because these are the initial months, we have a couple of suppliers, and these suppliers are basically from the glasses world, such as Essilor, RestoringVision, and VisionSpring. It was a little easy because while we were starting in this space a year back, we started exploring who are the key cadres with all the players in this market. We had these players, then we also have the small mom-and-pop shops who have glasses for a few cents, but the quality of them is very poor.

 For us, it was a little easier decision because there were established names, and we didn't want to get into figuring out more. Our main objective was to figure out whether the entrepreneurial model works. It was not about figuring out the best supply chain for glasses. It was about taking glasses which are reliable with credibility from a credible name with good certifications. We only got glasses which are ISO, CE-certified. From a quality standpoint, we are getting the best ones, and we distribute them at the best price we can get right now.

Rollo Romig: At this stage, the supply needs are relatively low since it's a pilot?

 **Ankur Sanghai:** It's a pilot, yes. We also know that we are not [envisioning] that we will be in the space of manufacturing glasses. In the future, also, with all our different programs across the government or entrepreneurship, we want a roster of suppliers to be available. We don't want to get into deciding which ones are good, because then biases start creeping in. We don't want to get into that space, we just want to get a roster of good suppliers who have good certified glasses at different price points, and whoever is the beneficiary, maybe the entrepreneur or the cadre, they can make a call.

Rollo Romig: Then eventually, the entrepreneurs will be responsible for getting their own supply?

Ankur Sanghai: Yes. By eventually, I mean, in those three to six months when they will be on their own foot. The idea is, at the end of those six months, they will be able to buy glasses directly.

Right now, we are not worried about that because most of these players we spoke to, like Essilor or VisionSpring, have very good logistics networks in the country. They are able to deliver glasses to me in every nook and corner of the country. It's not that big of a problem in terms of logistics and supply chain.

Rollo Romig: What about pricing? Will they have to worry about negotiating prices, or will that just be the same thing?

Ankur Sanghai: That's between the entrepreneur and the supplier. We will let the entrepreneur know at what prices generally these glasses are available, so that the entrepreneur has a reference point. Beyond that, it'll be between them, but just to be very honest, at an entrepreneurial level, again, we are not talking about thousands of glasses. Maybe in the future they will negotiate. They won't have that much negotiating power. It will be whatever is the market price for these glasses, and that price is mostly what we will have to purchase it at.

One way a social entrepreneurship startup comes into play is through a cohort of entrepreneurs with whom they work continuously. In other places, that startup might decide to aggregate the demand and purchase as a collective. That can be a different way of looking at it.

Rollo Romig: It will be something they'll have to figure out and get good at, because a lot of them probably don't have experience with negotiating for prices.

Ankur Sanghai: For us, we'll make the model open. We'll open-source all the technology around it, our findings, everything. We want interesting places to come in, and we'll just take it up and propagate it.

Rollo Romig: When the entrepreneurs become more independent, will they still have the same partners to rely on, such as Aravind and Shroff?

Ankur Sanghai: I think so, yes. The good thing is, these players with whom we are partnered, all of them have a charity arm. The mandate of the charity arm is for the welfare of society in terms of eye health, so there's no reason that they will step away from it. Both Aravind and Shroff have their own charity arms, both have their NGO units.

Rollo Romig: Do both hospitals have nationwide reach, or is it more regional?

Ankur Sanghai: It's more regional. Aravind is in Tamil Nadu, Shroff is in Uttar Pradesh, but that is something we can help with. We are good with networking, we are good with creating partnerships. Like in Karnataka, we have formed a partnership with iDrishti Group. There's another group in Odisha. Those things we can help with to connect the pieces of the puzzle. That's what we are good at. As The/Nudge, one of our expectations is how to let the ecosystem come together.

Rollo Romig: Tell me how things are going in Uttar Pradesh, and how it's different?

Ankur Sanghai: In Uttar Pradesh, first of all, it's male-dominated. Again, both were not by design, it happened by coincidence.

Rollo Romig: Male-dominated in terms of the entrepreneurs?

Ankur Sanghai: The entrepreneurs. In Uttar Pradesh, we have one female right now. There were two, but one has left, it didn't work out for her, and the remaining five are males. In Tamil Nadu, it's all dominated by females. Here, we approached males as well. They were not so receptive to the program, for whatever the reason be.

Rollo Romig: What do you think that is?

Ankur Sanghai: What we gathered from those few interviews was that they felt this going door-to-door job is not something worth their time or effort, or it's a little below their capabilities.

Rollo Romig: Why do you think it's different from Uttar Pradesh?

Ankur Sanghai: In Uttar Pradesh, also, the income levels may be playing a little role. Household income differences between the states, and the primary earner not working, might have played a role. In Uttar Pradesh, when they saw the option, they came on board. At the same time, I'm not

very sure, because yesterday, when we were speaking to Maheshwari, we understood that her husband is also not a full-time earner in the current scenario. There must be many like that. That is something we need to dig into a little more. Once the project expands a bit, when we get to interview more people, then probably we'll have sufficient data to see exactly why this is happening.

Rollo Romig: Do you think that part of it might be that women in Tamil Nadu have a little more independence than women in Uttar Pradesh?

Ankur Sanghai: That's what I understand. That's the reason more women are in Tamil Nadu. Why men are not interested in Uttar Pradesh, I'm not able to answer.

Rollo Romig: Maybe that's part of the reason you're seeing fewer women in Uttar Pradesh?

Ankur Sanghai: Yes, that's the core reason why fewer women are in Uttar Pradesh, because their independence is less. Here in Tamil Nadu, the ease with which women travel across villages, even using public transport, is not so common in Uttar Pradesh.

Rollo Romig: That's a big north-south difference. What other differences have you noticed between the two states?

Ankur Sanghai: Second is that we are selling at a higher price point in Tamil Nadu as compared to Uttar Pradesh. Again, we started like that only because we felt the population density was less. We had to make the entrepreneur viable. For that, we started with a higher price point, we started with ₹300 [US\$3.45] in Tamil Nadu. In Uttar Pradesh, we felt the population density was high, but at the same time, income levels are lower, so we can start with a lower price point, but the entrepreneurs will be able to sell more glasses there. We started with ₹200 [US\$2.30] in Uttar Pradesh, and we started with ₹300 [US\$3.43] in Tamil Nadu. We are also planning to do a small study of trying some different price points to understand how price, quantity, and sales follow each other. In both the states, we are planning to do it this quarter.

Rollo Romig: So far, the starting prices remain the same in both places, ₹200 in Uttar Pradesh and ₹300 in Tamil Nadu. You haven't changed it within the state?

Ankur Sanghai: No, now I have changed. In Uttar Pradesh, I transitioned to ₹250 [US\$2.88]. There were two reasons to do that. One was that I wanted to do this study to understand which price points work. We wanted to do that because everybody is focused on the free distribution model, which has its limitations. If you follow the entrepreneurship or market model also, you want to know which price points work. That was another data we want to generate for the ecosystem so that they can take it up. They don't have to do all the studies.

Second reason was that in Uttar Pradesh, my general entrepreneurs were not able to meet the sales targets. In Tamil Nadu, the ladies in the second month have hit the four number, which leads to around ₹15,000 [US\$172.56] of monthly income after their expenses. In Uttar Pradesh, the people were not able to hit that. The number was around six. So I moved to ₹250. One more reason to move to ₹250 was that if you are not able to sell a lot, you have to increase the price to reach that sustainable level, so I transitioned to ₹250. I didn't see the sales going down, so that was a bit positive.

In Uttar Pradesh, except for one entrepreneur who will also transition in a day or two, all of them have moved to ₹250. It is taking me a little more time there to get the entrepreneurs to be in a stable state. In Tamil Nadu, the entrepreneurs have moved to a level where it appears they have reached sustainability, at least in the short term. Now it is just about whether they are able to sustain those levels, which we will know over the course of next few months.



In Uttar Pradesh, the general entrepreneurs haven't reached the sustainable level yet. The lead entrepreneurs are terrific, but the general entrepreneurs haven't [reached that yet]. There are two main issues I am seeing there. One is that when they go to a customer and offer the glasses for sale, if the customer doesn't show too much interest, these guys don't spend time to convince them. That was the basic reason which is happening everywhere. Secondly, these guys are also not giving enough time. It's expected that they should give five hours at least, and they are not even giving that. We are looking at maybe the hiring policy to improve those measures. Hiring more middle-aged people who have dependents who need to earn. Those are the things we are trying in Uttar Pradesh.

Rollo Romig: What else? Other differences?

Ankur Sanghai: Remaining similar things include that sometimes it works at a community level, word is spreading, and many people buy it. Sometimes it is more like door-to-door, and you have to convince every house. Those things are similar.

Rollo Romig: Tell me other things you've had to iterate or change in either place.

Ankur Sanghai: When the Tamil Nadu model was successful, I went full blast on female hiring in Uttar Pradesh. In Tamil Nadu, the females are doing good work. They are dedicated. In Uttar Pradesh, we were having a hard time managing the male members. We went full blast on female hiring, but that didn't work out. In two days, we hired, I think, four. Out of four, only one stayed. Three went away in one or two days. Second thing was that it was not so easy to get a good pool in Uttar Pradesh, as it was in Tamil Nadu, because of their independence, I guess.

Rollo Romig: Do you think that women are better at selling to women, and men are better at selling to men?



Ankur Sanghai: No. I think it's something more elaborate than that. Men are good at selling to men, but women are good at selling to both genders. Women have more default trust and credibility for the average person to allow her to enter your house and do screening. You are a little reluctant when there is a male member standing outside who wants to do screening, who is a stranger.

Even if you are a male figure in the house, if it's a woman, there's an inherent trust, by default. With women, we've seen it's a little easier to enter houses and do screenings, as compared to males. Also, women are able to sell to both males and females with the same ease. Male members are able to sell to male members easily. Female members, if they allow them in the house, then it works, but with male members, there's a little more effort as compared to females.

Rollo Romig: Is there anything else you've tried that didn't work but you learned something from?

Ankur Sanghai: Something that might not be so relevant is that I hired two or three people who were part of a camp model, who had worked for some NGOs here and there and distributed glasses. They already knew about presbyopia screening. They were not optometrists, but they had been trained, similar to how we train. I hired them because I thought that they already knew that, so the optometrist part is already solved, and now it's only about sales.

It didn't work out with them at all. The main reason I saw was that once you have worked in that whole camp model and that NGO setup, the entrepreneurship aspects are not there. These guys couldn't adapt to that. If the people in that village go to the farms in the daytime, then you have to go to that village early in the day, or in the afternoon when they're back to have their lunch. These people couldn't think in that way. These people thought it was like a 10-to-5 job.

That didn't work out. Then we decided not to waste time thinking that since these people knew about presbyopia, it would be easy. It became more difficult to manage them. We went for "freshers," people who were more interested in some entrepreneurship opportunity, and who had some community experience.

Rollo Romig: Was it actually harder with the ones who had the camp model because they kind of had a wrong idea of how to approach it in this way?

Ankur Sanghai: Yes.

Rollo Romig: Because they're used to people coming to them. One thing that kept coming up with the entrepreneurs is that they learned that they have to do a lot more talking at the beginning.

Ankur Sanghai: Yes.

Rollo Romig: Just making a lengthy pitch, which you don't have to do in a camp.

Ankur Sanghai: The camp model has a different issue. In the entrepreneurship model, you're spending most of the time convincing the customer to purchase the glasses with your whole sales pitch. That takes most of your time, and it's a good amount of time. It can go from 5 to maybe 20 or 25 minutes in convincing. In the camp model, this doesn't exist. In the camp model, another issue which someone spoke about in one of my meetings last week, was that these community workers, in many cases, their payments are very contextual. In some cases, they get their payments six months down the line because of all the bureaucracy or whatever processes are out there.

How easy will it be to convince them, and to get so many community members to conduct screenings and distribute glasses in a time-bound manner? Because we have kept a 10-year timeline. We are talking about getting things quickly done. We are not talking about centuries. It will be interesting to know how these community cadres think about their salaries.

Rollo Romig: The entrepreneurial model is very time-consuming. As a result, they are distributing a lot fewer glasses than you can do in a camp every day. How do you feel about that in terms of the ability to scale?

Ankur Sanghai: The thing is that you will be distributing fewer glasses as compared to a camp, definitely. Based on our models and the numbers we have targeted, it should be enough for the entrepreneurs to earn a sustainable living. We are hitting those numbers, at least in Tamil Nadu. That was the first requirement. Now, secondly, we always know that this model can't exist in isolation. If you rely only on the entrepreneurship model, then you have to create maybe hundreds of thousands of entrepreneurs to reach our audacious target.

At the same time, there is a chunk of people who cannot afford even 200 or 300 rupees [US\$2.30 or \$3.45] for a pair of glasses. They also need to be catered to. Your free distribution model will always exist. Probably it will always be leading as compared to the entrepreneurship model. We believe in that. That's why we are pursuing both. The whole idea is to keep on pursuing that free distribution model. There are a lot of dependencies. You cross each dependency when and as they come, and you move to the next level.



If the entrepreneurship model hits a critical mass, it will just start scaling on its own. Once these ladies hit this, if I have 100 or 200 entrepreneurs out here, and if they achieve this sustainable sales target, then automatically I don't have to search for the next 101st entrepreneur, she will join on her own. It's just like a local shop. The government doesn't push people to open shops. People know that shops are successful, and they can make a decent living. They open shops on their own. People will start doing this on their own.

Rollo Romig: With a camp, the minute there is no funding, it stops.

Ankur Sanghai: We just want to hit that critical mass. Whatever that is, we will come to know through experiments only. Organically, people will come in, and they will join us. Organically, the Mageswaris of the world will come. They will see success here. They will see the Mageswaris of the world making so much money in just three or four hours a day. Then they will just come in like that.

Rollo Romig: When I asked Maheshwari what made you want to do this work, she immediately said money. That's actually very encouraging. Of course, you want them to believe in the mission and all that, the social cause. But it's not sustainable for them unless they are actually making money off of it, or they can see that they will make money off of it.

Ankur Sanghai: This also comes from my farming days, when I was working on good environmental practices, which are good for the farmer as well. That's what I feel about these social cause initiatives. We forget about the initiators. Unless the project works for them, why will they do it? Mageswari has been into social causes throughout her life. Still, when you asked that question, the first reply was money. It was not the betterment.

Rollo Romig: She didn't even mention the betterment.

Ankur Sanghai: Yes. That is why I love market models. I am a big proponent of using market models to solve long-overdue problems in the country and across the world.

Rollo Romig: You mentioned that reading glasses are not medicalized in India.

Ankur Sanghai: Yes, and also by WHO [World Health Organization], so that's true in most of the parts of the world, like in the United States.

Rollo Romig: In most of the world, yes. Are there any other regulatory obstacles when it comes to doing this work?

Ankur Sanghai: One of the things I feel will happen eventually, is that it's not so common. It is not known so widely that presbyopia is this near-vision impairment, it is demedicalized, and it has a simple solution, which is reading glasses. This whole concept may not have percolated to all the levels of the government. Yes, at the central level, let's say, or at the state level, this message is clear, but it may not have percolated to the bottom of the layer. That awareness we might have to create.

Today we are in just two places. Generalizing these two will be difficult. It might happen that once we start expanding in different places, and some people see these entrepreneurs doing screening and all, they may not feel comfortable. What are they doing? These entrepreneurs don't have any medical degree or even tertiary medical degree. How come they are doing all of this? We envision such problems will happen, because we have seen similar things in different sectors and segments.

For that, advocacy is required. For that, we are working with AIIMS [All India Institute Of Medical Sciences], which is the most premier medical institution in the country. We are working with different ministries in the central government so that this message can be very loud and clear.

Rollo Romig: When it comes to working on advocacy with different governments, central governments, state governments, are some easier and more responsive to work with than others?

Ankur Sanghai: That's always the case. There is a priority. There are thousands of things to do for them. Where do you fit in? How do they see you? That is handled at a different level. Amit Gupta [COO of The/Nudge] normally handles advocacy and government relationships.

What I envision, and what I see normally, is that everybody understands that this is important. It's something that's easy to do because we are just talking about reading glasses. Again, it depends on where you fit in the pecking order, and where does this fit into the 100 other things which need to be done.

Rollo Romig: The entrepreneurs are out there, spreading the word in door-to-door ways. Has The/Nudge considered spreading the word in other ways, either through advertising or other approaches, to prime the market for entrepreneurs?

Ankur Sanghai: We have discussed it, and also with the ecosystem players. That is because awareness is the biggest root cause of the low penetration of reading glasses, and the high cases of existing presbyopia in the country, but we could not take action on it yet due to resources, but it is in the pipeline. It is something that needs to happen. It's not a question of if, it's more a question of when.

Also, it's about whether you can get a Bollywood actor to talk about it? Like Essilor did with Amitabh Bachchan 10 years back. Those things have big impacts. Those are definitely in our pipeline, something which we need to do.

Rollo Romig: Did Amitabh Bachchan do something about presbyopia in particular?

Ankur Sanghai: I think it was about presbyopia, but I didn't see the advertisement. It was 10-12 years ago. Essilor did a campaign with him, and apparently it was very successful. The/Nudge is very open to all the ecosystem players. For these things also, we are trying to initiate conversations with other ecosystem players, like how we can come together and get these advocacy messages done.

Rollo Romig: Maheshwari mentioned that it would be helpful for her to have an explanatory or promotional video that she could show to people when she arrives at their door. Is that something you might do?

Ankur Sanghai: Yes. There are two ways. One is just making a video, which I'm running this quarter. It'll have real people and some computer graphics and all. The longer view is that the video needs to have some big personalities from the cricket, politics, or the Bollywood world, because then you get the beneficiaries' attention. Initially in this quarter, I'll be making such videos for Mageswari and people.

Rollo Romig: Are you distributing all five diopters?

Ankur Sanghai: Yes.

Rollo Romig: Is it an even spread of who needs which diopter, or are the lower powers more popular?

Ankur Sanghai: The middle powers are more popular. 1.5 and 2 are the most popular. Then comes your 2.5, and 1 and 3 are the lowest. Sorry, 1 is lower than 1.5 and 2.

Rollo Romig: Why do you think it's lower than 1.5? Is it because people are already a little older when you're catching them?

Ankur Sanghai: That is one reason. Second reason is that the people who refuse to purchase or who could not get screened are normally in that young category, because they're mostly out for work, or they don't want to wear something because they're young and they do not want to have glasses on their face.

Rollo Romig: The ones who are around 40 are the hardest to reach.

Ankur Sanghai: 35 to 40. The idea is that if we create a critical mass in their village with those who are wearing glasses and who are very happy about it, then these 35-to-40 people will also cling to that and see the benefit.

Rollo Romig: Did you ever consider carrying a smaller selection of diopters just to make it easier from a supply direction, or always just all five?

Ankur Sanghai: No, all five. Actually people have been asking the opposite question, that is, why don't you carry more diopters?

Rollo Romig: Are there more diopters?

Ankur Sanghai: 0.5 exists, but we don't carry it. We carry these five. This was, again, based on the data we got from the ecosystem players such as RestoringVision, VisionSpring, and others. Based on their analysis, we found these five are the most common. Among these five, 1.5 to 2.5 are the most used. 3 is a little on the lower side, 2.5 after that.

We don't carry too many frames. We just carry one frame because the more inventory you bring into the mix, the more confusion and complication you bring for the entrepreneur. That's why we carry just one frame for now. Eventually the entrepreneurs will be free to keep more frames as they go, if they want.

Rollo Romig: If you have a bunch of styles, then that's just another decision.

Ankur Sanghai: Yes. The more decisions the customer has to make, the lesser chances of a confirmed sale.

Rollo Romig: Are there stories of someone who got glasses and was very happy about it?

Ankur Sanghai: For me, it was a personal story where I felt that yes, this is a project that needs to be done. I was doing my field trip, so I went to where our NGO was doing a certain door-to-door initiative. They were giving glasses for free. They did the screening at home, but then you have to go to their vision center to get the glasses.

First, the screening was done for the husband and the wife, then the diopter detection was done, and then the lady was given the right diopter glasses, the demo glasses, and she was again asked to thread a needle or to segregate her rice. That time, the smile and the happiness I saw in her face was amazing. Then she started narrating how she's feeling so different, that it will have a great impact on her cooking in terms of efficiency and help. She was really happy about it. That was one moment.

Then I started asking a few questions. The couple were told that they need glasses, and they need to go to the vision center to get the glasses. At the vision center, they were offering the glasses for, again, like ₹100 or ₹200. It was not purely free, but it was a little subsidized.

I asked the lady if she was going. She told me that she needed the glasses, but it depended on her husband. Then I asked the husband. He said, "Ah, it's not that useful. I don't read so much. It's fine." I said, "Why are you not going? It's subsidized. It's a low price that you can afford," based on the house I saw. But he said they did not need to spend money on this.

Then I asked the wife if she felt the same way. She said, "No, I need it, but I'm dependent on someone to take me to the clinic, otherwise it doesn't work." Then I asked them what they would say if it was free of cost. The husband said, "Yes. Then mostly I might go." But it was not, "Yes, I am going now," or "I am going tomorrow." I knew that once we were out of the house, it may be today, tomorrow, or a week. It's not going to be today, and probably it won't be tomorrow either. Then I asked the wife again about the fee. She again said, "I am dependent on my husband or someone from the family to take me because it's not so close."

Then I posed a third question and said, “What about if I offered you a pair of glasses? I know your type. I offered you a pair right now, but I’m not going to give it to you for free. I’m going to charge ₹200 for it.” Both the husband and the wife said yes. That was a moment for me that just happened naturally, it was not planned. It was my first outing.



It was very clear to me that door-to-door is the key. Glasses need to be offered then and there because that “aha” moment has just happened. You need to capitalize on that and leverage that. Second thing I felt was that, yes, you can charge for the glasses. It’s not a big obstacle. People are ready to pay. They see the benefits, then and there. If I was selling them a pesticide, it would take me six months to show the benefit. Here, I’m showing them the benefit in a second. What more do you need?

Rollo Romig: That’s great for now.

ICON LEGEND



Advocacy



Money



Supply



Demand generation



Partnerships



Technology



Distribution channel



Regulation



Training



Media campaigns and marketing



Screening

Rollo Romig is the manager of Solutions Insights Lab. He is the author of I Am on the Hit List: A Journalist's Murder and the Rise of Autocracy in India, which was named a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

** This interview has been edited and condensed.*