



"The cheaper ones sell the most": Bangladeshi pharmacist Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu on overcoming challenges and selling more reading glasses

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Translator: You have three price points. Which one sells the best?



Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu: 150, 200, and 250 [taka] [about \$1.25, \$1.70 and \$2.10]. The cheaper ones sell the most usually.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Do you feel that is an affordable price to pay?

Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu: I think it is affordable. It is generally easy for people to pay 150 [taka].

Translator: A lot of people don't buy. If you examine ten people, and six of them need glasses, how many of them will buy?

Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu: If six people need them...four people buy them.

Translator: The two people who don't buy, what do they say?

Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu: They say they will go to the doctor, don't have money, they will come back in a few days, things like that.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Can you talk a little bit about your training?



Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu: The training started at 10AM until 2PM. I took tests on everything we learned. There was a lot of information shared.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: What was the best/most important part of the training?

Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu: I really enjoyed the game. I learned a lot about the nerves in the eyes, how some nerves in the eyes die when people reach a certain age. At what age people start having issues with far vision.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: What needs to happen to sell 100 glasses?



Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu: Actually, I don't sell 10 every month. Some months I sell 5, 7, 8, like that. If I want to increase sales, I think it would be nice to have microphones (megaphone advertising) and various banners in places to advertise...if sometimes there were more events. It would be good to put ads around, in schools, that kind of thing.

Unknown voice: Can I ask another question if you allow me. In this bazaar, how many people got eyeglass training? Just you. Do you think people see you differently compared to other stores now?

Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu: Yes, people know that they can get glasses at my store, and it has increased sales.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: How does he realize people need a screening? People are usually coming for malaria or dysentery.



Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu: A lot of the time a lot of people ask if the expiration date on their medicine is passed or not. They tell me that they cannot read the small text. So then I tell them, you know I sell glasses here too. Also I tell a lot of people that when you are 35 or older, a lot of people have issues with seeing things up close, they become farsighted. I also tell people that if you know anyone at home or in your circle who has problems with their vision, they should come and get glasses here.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: For other countries that are trying to do work with pharmacists, what is some advice you would give them?

Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu: I would tell them that when people are 35 years of age and older, every person needs reading glasses. I would tell them that at first you should pay attention to age. A lot of companies sell glasses. I would tell them that I got training from VisionSpring, I learned a lot from them, and their glasses are high quality.

↗ I would tell them that you already sell medicine, you are in contact with a lot of doctors, you should see if there are any good doctors you can work with. I would tell them you probably already sell medicine for eyes, eye drops. You can sell glasses alongside that eye medicine. At first you might not make a lot, but as people get to know by word of mouth, business will steadily increase over a few months.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Is there anything that is not working and could be improved?

↗ **Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu:** We also have an office in another location nearby. Are you involved in that area? I would suggest looking into establishing a presence there. If every few months there was some kind of event or drive that would be good too...maybe selling to teachers at schools...linking with local NGOs and health workers.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Why do you think that pharmacists don't work with the health workers already?

👉 **Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu:** They work in the field, they give them glasses themselves. They have their own programs and centers, so they do not need to work with us.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: What is preventing him from starting a relationship with these health workers?

Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu: I actually had not thought of this idea. I know some people that I can speak with about this kind of plan.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Does he feel that his commission is a proper amount?

👉 **Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu:** I get around 10-50 taka [\$0.08-\$0.42]. It is not the same for all customers. I think the amount is fine.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Anything else to add?

Md. Moazzem Hossen Mithu: If the frames were a bit more attractive, I think it would help. The glasses do not break, but sometimes the glass becomes blurry.

ICON LEGEND



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Demand generation



Partnerships



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Regulation



Training



Media campaigns and marketing



Screening

Ambika Samarthya-Howard (she/her) is Solutions Journalism Network's Chief Innovation Officer. She strategizes on communications, metrics, impact, product and technology, leveraging platforms for the network and creating cool content. She also leads the Solutions Insights Lab, an initiative of SJN that uses targeted research and analysis to identify and interrogate what's working and what's not in a particular sector or field. She has an MFA from Columbia's film program and has been creating, teaching and writing at the intersection of storytelling and social good for two decades. She has produced content for Current TV, UNICEF, Havas, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Prism.

** This interview has been edited and condensed.*