

HAKIM OPTICAL



Mastering lens making in Switzerland.

19 year old Navy salvage diver.

Karim, 10 years old at the market.

Mr. Hakimi at 17 years of age.

1. EARLY DAYS

When he was just nine years old, Karim Hakimi suffered through the loss of his father. The young Iranian left school to support his family. After a brief stint at a Tehran blacksmith shop, Karim found employment grinding magnifying glass from old window panes. As a young boy, he learned many aspects of the eyewear business, from lens grinding to equipment maintenance and upkeep of worn machinery. Long before he knew it, Karim was sowing the seeds of one of the most successful optical companies in Canadian history, by learning from his experiences and finding opportunities where others saw adversity.

2. A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY

As a 14-year-old, Karim set his sights on completing his education and tried to reach the former Soviet Union to enroll. Caught by a border guard and returned to his native Iran, Karim was undaunted in his effort to improve himself, and toiled in night school to learn how to read and write. Five years later, Karim enlisted in the Iranian Navy and enjoyed his first tastes of the world that awaited beyond his own borders. He emigrated to Germany and also worked in Switzerland, where he learned modern methods of grinding optical lenses for precision instruments and eyeglasses.

3. SETTING SIGHTS HIGH

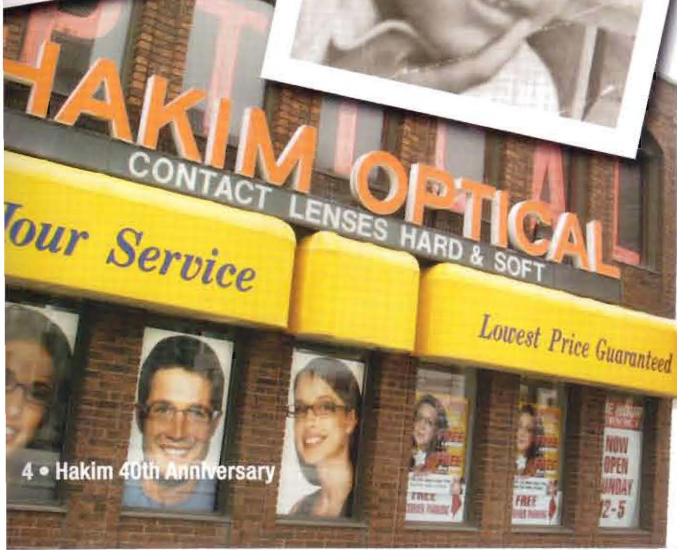
In search of a future where he would find the success he craved, Karim came to Canada and found work in the field of ophthalmic lens grinding. Carefully saving his money as he gained the expertise he needed, Karim waited for his chance to strike out on his own. In 1967, he set up a laboratory in the dance hall of the former Elmwood Hotel on Elm Street in downtown Toronto. Next, he bought and rebuilt old equipment from a closed-down lab in Chicago. Karim's dream was becoming reality. Armed with dozens of pairs of his very own and brand-new lenses for sale, Karim began to knock on doors.

4. A MAN OF VISION

Karim's entrepreneurial spirit led him to the shops of opticians and optometrists who supplied him with frames to mount his lenses and paid him the not-so-princely sum of about \$4 per pair. And although Karim's reputation as a quality lens grinder soon became well-known, he quickly realized that he needed to become his own middle man if he wanted to capture more of the \$80 retail price of a pair of eyeglasses that his optician friends were able to charge. Karim decided he needed to learn more about marketing strategy; specifically something called "vertical integration."

5. WHOLESALE MEETS RETAIL

In the wholesale trade, his profit margin was less than one dollar. By making his own lenses and selling directly to the public, his profits increased to over five dollars, with prices still well below those of other shops. Karim decided that the key to bigger success was to find a way to market his quality, lower-cost product directly to the public. Opening a small storefront operation, Karim sold dozens of pairs of eyeglasses during the day, and then would often stay at work most of the night grinding lenses to fulfill his promise to his customers of 24-hour delivery on every order.



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“I truly believe it’s important to make a difference in the lives of others.”

SIR HAKIMI

6. GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Karim’s philosophy of honest value, quality and personal attention brought customers flocking to his retail outlet, which became so busy that customers had to wait outside until someone left. Satisfied customers returned often, and brought their friends and family with them. To accommodate his burgeoning business, Karim moved his equipment into the basement. Soon, his showroom and eye examination centre had taken over the entire main floor. Not wanting to turn anybody away, Karim went the extra mile to grind special lenses for cataract patients and provide other unique services as requested by his customers.

7. KEYS TO SUCCESS

One of the many keys to Hakim Optical’s success was Karim’s commitment to hiring, personally training, and mentoring the best young staff he could find. As a result, many have stayed with the company for decades, working as opticians and technicians. As well-trained staff began to run more of the technical side of the business, Karim’s time was freed up to enable him to focus on developing new retail opportunities. Today, customer value and quality remain integral to the company’s mission statement, and factor largely in Hakim Optical’s extremely loyal client base.

8. QUALITY FIRST - AND FREE FRAMES

By purchasing frames at bargain prices through bankruptcy sales, Karim launched his innovative marketing strategy of offering free frames with the purchase of a pair of lenses. Soon, he was buying thousands of low-priced fashion frames directly from manufacturers and offering a much wider selection of frames. To keep standards high, Hakim still offers a one-year guarantee against breakage on all frames. Karim enjoys recounting the story of competitors’ objections to his claims of having the lowest prices in town. After thorough investigation, the case was dropped when it was revealed that Hakim Optical’s claim was completely valid.

9. MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

“A pair of glasses isn’t just a device to aid your eyesight,” says Karim. “They’re fashion.” Many customers are attracted by the store’s philosophy that eyewear should also look good and flatter the face. Today, Hakim Optical offers a selection of more than 3,000 fashion frames imported from as far away as the Far East, Italy, France and Germany. The golden rule at Hakim remains the same in 2008 as it was in 1967: serve as you would be served. Today, 80% of the store’s clientele are repeat customers. In a typical day, the company sells at least 1,000 pairs of prescription eyeglasses.

10. A CANADIAN SUCCESS STORY

By consistently offering value, selection and excellent customer service, Sir Karim Hakimi has turned a one-person operation into one of the most successful optical companies in Canada, with over 40 million pairs of eyeglasses sold to date. Today, Hakim Optical has 140 showrooms and 100 one-hour factory outlets in Ontario, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador and is expanding further into Western Canada. A supporter of Ride For Sight, Karim regularly dons helmet and leathers before hopping on his motorcycle to participate in this and other vision-oriented charitable causes. Hakim Optical also donates hundreds of thousands of pairs of eyeglasses to those in less fortunate countries.

