

Current Direct-to-Consumer Sales Models

When evaluating the best solutions to adapt your practice to direct-to-consumer hearing aid sales models, it will be helpful to understand the current delivery models.

Most online delivery models fall into two separate categories:

- The consumer purchases a device online which is then programmed and fit face-to-face by an audiologist; and
- The consumer orders a preprogrammed device based on audiometric information provided by the consumer and the hearing aid is shipped directly to the consumer “ready to wear.”

The following are the current online delivery models with accompanying descriptions:

Online, Third Party Facilitator Model: The consumer is directed to call a toll-free number listed online to begin a conversation with a “hearing consultant” who assesses the consumer’s communication needs, lifestyle, and expectations. This identified consultant then assists the consumer with scheduling an appointment with a contracted local audiology clinic. The consultant makes a hearing aid recommendation and discusses payment options. Once ordered, the hearing aid is sent to the contracted local clinic and the consumer is referred to that office for the hearing aid fitting.

Consumer Adjusted Model: The consumer is directed to submit a current audiogram online or to a corporate mailing address. The consumer receives a device in the mail with either controls (trim potentiometers) that are adjustable by the consumer or with hearing aid software that can be installed on the consumer’s home computer for adjustment. Some of the devices dispensed have a foam pillow or other non-custom tip to allow for a comfortable “customized” fit in the ear.

Consumer Receives Pre-Programmed Device Model: Hearing aids are marketed online as created by “major manufacturers” and are priced very low. The products look very similar to hearing aids commonly fit in dispensing practices but are sold under non-mainstream manufacturer names. An audiogram is submitted during the purchasing process and the hearing aids are delivered to the consumer programmed and “ready to wear.”