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Bluwinx: Eyeglasses to cut down on insomnia

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"The shorter your sleep, the shorter your life." –Matthew Walker, author of *Why we Sleep*. The World Health Organization estimates that two-thirds of the people in the world do not get enough sleep. Lack of sleep has been scientifically linked to numerous health problems, and the lack of attentiveness caused by a shortage of sleep linked to thousands of deaths by traffic accidents.

Joseph Petrolla has been involved in sleep science for four decades. He has spent an entire career working with sleep product companies and is now the co-founder of the new Youngstown company Bluwinx (<https://bluwinx.com>), along with co-founder and partner Edward Kiernan.

But even Petrolla does not know why people do not get enough sleep.

"There are a 100 different sleep disorders," he said. "Insomnia can be caused by many different things."

One stimulus that numerous studies have definitively been proven to cause insomnia is an overabundance of blue light streaming from the television, tablet and phone screens that dominate our lives, Petrolla said.

Blue light is one of the most powerful colors in the spectrum. According to research at Harvard University and many other places, blue light is necessary for health during the

daytime. But at night, exposure to too much blue light—particularly from phone, iPad, television and other electronic screens—can interfere with the sleep cycle and may cause all kinds of health problems.

That Harvard sleep research found that blue light suppressed melatonin, which is the chemical that the body produces to put us to sleep.

Bluwinx has created eyeglasses that can help with this very modern problem. The company has started producing and selling eyeglasses that virtually eliminate blue light exposure from electronic screens.

“The natural sleep cycle is connected to the sun,” said Petrolla. “The sun goes down, and we naturally fall asleep. At least some of that is connected to the body’s production of melatonin.”

Blue light cuts the production of melatonin. That is one reason, and perhaps the primary reason, why it is difficult to fall asleep after spending time exposed to blue light right before going to bed. A few years ago, Petrolla decided to develop blue light-reducing eyewear in the hopes of solving at least one of the causes of insomnia.

Petrolla connected with partner Edward Kiernan as a business consultant. Kiernan said that his first thought after taking a look at Petrolla’s idea was “what about children?”

“I have two kids, and they are exposed to blue light for hours each day,” said Kiernan.

He said he immediately saw the advantage of diminishing the amounts of blue light that children are exposed to all day. He also took a look at the market and saw a few companies marketing blue light glasses, but none that was concentrating on the children’s market. Kiernan saw a huge market opening.

Both partners also decided to market their glasses to the market for anyone who was seeking out prescription eyeglasses, as well as making readers and plain, nonprescription glasses available. The blue light filter is chemically embedded into the lens material, rather than being sprayed on, which makes for a much more substantial product than some of the company’s competitors.

The Bluwinx website allows a visitor to plug in a prescription and order from dozens of glasses designs. The price is comparable to, or lower than, getting glasses from any online or brick-and-mortar store, said Petrolla. He also said that more designer frames were on the way, as well as possibly gaming glasses. And the emphasis is on children’s frames. “We are the only company in this market that sells a wide variety of kid’s glasses,” he said.

Petrolla cautioned that simply eliminating blue light is potentially curing only one of numerous possible causes of a bad night’s sleep, and he also said that adjusting to a different sleep pattern “takes time.” But early indications are that this business model is going to work. “We have people ordering glasses from us from all over the country and out of the country,” he said.

Petrolla would like to involve Bluwinx in programs to help children who may not be able to afford these glasses. Kiernan, on the business side, is ready to expand the business, and is actively looking for funding to take Bluwinx to the next level.

The company is ready to take off, said Petrolla. “Insomnia is an underserved market.”