



Focusing on Vision

RevitalVision trains brains to improve eyesight.
By Kate Leibsle

Entrepreneur
Dennis Depenbusch

Type of Business
Vision Improvement

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Quote

“The lesson I’ve learned to enhance your chance of success, is find the leaders of industry, seek their opinion and input on the market need and gain their endorsement. If they are willing to support, invest and endorse your product because they believe, it will make a difference.”
-Dennis Depenbusch

Dennis Depenbusch and the staff at RevitalVision have a vision improvement option that involves a patient and a computer, resulting in brighter, crisper, sharper vision without invasive procedures.

RevitalVision is an online program of exercises that can improve vision. It’s an FDA-approved, scientifically backed therapeutic program that has the backing of some of the biggest names in the vision industry. When the RevitalVision says it can improve vision by two lines on the eye chart, it has the scientific background to back the claim, said Depenbusch, the company’s CEO and managing partner.

The program uses Gabor patches, developed by a Nobel Prize winner, Dennis Gabor. Users complete a series of exercises on their home computer that work on training their brains and eyes to work together to enhance vision.

“It stimulates the visual cortex between the eye and the brain,” Depenbusch said.

The product can help just about anyone who needs vision correction, he said, but the company is targeting post-cataract, post-Lasik and amblyopic (lazy eye) patients, and people who need reading glasses. Another group the company has started working with is athletes.

Bubble and Burst Beginnings

Originally founded in Israel in 1999 as NeuroVision, the company was a beneficiary of the venture capital money that freely flowed during the height of the dot-com bubble. In 2000, the company received its first FDA approval, but then the dot-com bubble burst and financing dried up. The company regrouped and found itself working with the venture capital arm of the Singapore government.

Why Singapore? The country had a significant problem with pediatric myopia, so it wanted NeuroVision's help and paid for some pilot programs to be run there. To gain real traction in the United States, the company needed clinical trial evidence that the product worked. Enter Dr. Daniel Durrie and Dr. John D. Hunkeler.

The Kansas City area is a little-known leader in the vision industry, Depenbusch said. Dr. Durrie, founder, president and CEO of Durrie Vision Center in Overland Park is a longtime entrepreneur, serving on the advisory board or board of directors of a number of start-ups. Dr. Hunkeler, founder, president and CEO of Hunkeler Eye Institute, P.A., also based in Overland Park, has served as president of the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery, and on the boards of the Outpatient Ophthalmic Surgery Society and the Eye Bank Association of America.

Durrie headed up clinical trials of NeuroVision in post-lasik surgery patients. Hunkeler worked with post-cataract surgery patients.

Eye on Growth

Depenbusch joined NeuroVision in 2007. When the economy crashed in late 2008, the Singapore money dried up and the company was basically bankrupt. The week before Thanksgiving that year, NeuroVision closed its doors, but the board of directors asked Depenbusch if he wanted to buy the rights to the products. Negotiation followed and in June 2009, RevitalVision was born in Lawrence to be near the resources in Kansas City. That year, the company raised more than \$2.5 million.

Today, Depenbusch said the company of seven is poised for growth. RevitalVision is looking to expand its outreach to doctors worldwide. It already has doctors using the programs in Israel, Greece, Turkey, Singapore, Brazil, Britain and the Netherlands, with Italy coming online soon.

The program is only sold through ophthalmologists and optometrists, not directly to consumers, Depenbusch said. The company has worked hard to put real science behind its efforts and knows it has paid off because of the way doctors want to lend their names and backing to the products.

“Our investors are eye surgeons,” Deppenbusch said. “To have customers as investors is a great referral.”

Deppenbusch is a serial entrepreneur—this is his third start-up venture. With his experience, he knows that the industry buy-in and support is crucial.

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