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Q&A with Patrick Antaki, Co-Founder and CEO of Evergaze LLC bringing to market Advanced Digital Eyewear combining Prescription Glasses and a Lightweight Device enabling Macular Degeneration and Diabetic Retinopathy patients to Compensate for Vision Loss and Lead More Active Lives



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“seeBOOST is a practical alternative to going blind from macular degeneration or diabetes.”- Patrick Antaki

CEOCFO: *Mr. Antaki, what is the idea behind Evergaze and seeBOOST?*

Mr. Antaki: The concept is very simple: to provide prescription eyeglasses to a person suffering from macular degeneration or from diabetic retinopathy. No such thing has been done before. Ours is the first of its kind, the first concept and product that works so that when you lose vision due to these diseases you can in fact wear glasses to compensate for your vision loss.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us a little bit about macular degeneration?*

Mr. Antaki: Macular degeneration is usually referred to as age-related macular degeneration, because it impacts persons who are older. It can start as early as your fifties. More than a third of persons in their eighties have it to varying degrees. The way you know it is when you lose central vision. In other words, the portion of your vision that is directly in front of you where you are gazing, such as when reading, watching television or looking at faces, is no longer working. While you lose that portion of your vision, your peripheral vision remains unaffected. Even though the loss of vision is in a tiny circle in the center, it is very debilitating because that is where all of the detailed resolution in the eye is located. Therefore, these diseases have a significant impact on what you can and cannot do. There is no cure or treatment. The primary risk factor is simply growing old. There is a similar effect with diabetic retinopathy, whereby you also lose vision but as a result of diabetes. It is a very similar result in terms of loss of vision as with macular degeneration, even though diabetes is an entirely different disease vector. The number of persons suffering from both diseases is growing in almost direct proportion to the aging population around the world.

CEOCFO: *What have you developed at Evergaze?*

Mr. Antaki: We have developed eyeglasses that you can wear as comfortably as regular prescription eyeglasses. On these glasses we added a very sophisticated electro-optical system. Essentially, you are looking into a miniature television screen, although the image appears very large to you. That image is digitally enhanced so that what is physically in front of you is visually compensated for the vision loss, making easier to perceive. Crucially, seeBOOST, the name of our product, is ultra lightweight and extremely comfortable.

CEOCFO: *Is it one size fits all?*

Mr. Antaki: We mount the device onto conventional prescription glasses. Therefore, the prescription glasses themselves are customized for each person in that the frame size and type can be unique, just like any prescription glasses would be,

plus the prescription lenses which are also made to each individual. However, the electro-optical system that is mounted to those glasses, which embodies our core technology, is essentially one size fits all. Because it is electronic and software driven, it is easily adjusted using simple settings to take into account how far the disease has progressed for each person. We also make adjustments for the tasks that each person likes to do. For example, we have customers whose passion is to sew. Therefore, there are different settings that make sewing easier using seeBOOST than if you were going to do more outdoors activities or if you were more interested in watching television or reading, and so on. The good news is that you do not need to specify seeBOOST for only one task. You can use it for all sorts of normal-life activities and benefit with improved vision to help you improve your independence and quality of life.

CEOCFO: *What is happening with the electronics? How is it enabling people to see the way they need to?*

Mr. Antaki: There are two functions that seeBOOST performs. Number one, it magnifies. You can think of it as a magnifying glass that makes things bigger and therefore easier to see, except that it is much, much more sophisticated. For example, it focuses automatically and very, very quickly at any distance from a few inches to very far. If you move your eyes around from reading a book to looking at a face in the far distance, your eyes automatically change focus instantly and you do not even realize it. Likewise, this device does the same thing. You can change the magnification amount, whether you are trying to read, for example, the headline in the newspaper versus the smaller article text. You can make it bigger instantly. The second function it performs is that it automatically improves the contrast in a very intelligent manner. I will give you a simple example of what that means. If you read magazines or old newspapers printed on recycled paper, often the paper is not truly white and the letters are not pitch black, making this text hard to read, especially as you get older. Therefore, we electronically and automatically change the paper color to white and the text to black, so it is much easier to perceive. Then if you look at a person's face, the colors magically (automatically) go back to a more natural appearance. Those techniques have been demonstrated to work for people coping with these diseases in non head-mounted systems, for example, computers and screens on your desk or hand held magnifiers. What we have done is that we have taken all of decades of proven science, and we packaged it into a very small, very lightweight device that is hands free and that you can use and wear for a long amount of time to allow you to do many different things which you otherwise lost the ability to perform due to your vision loss. It is exactly like regular glasses which us normally-sighted people wear, but for macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy. A key technical attribute of seeBOOST is that most of these adaptations are automatic and intelligent. There is only a single knob to learn, used to change magnification.

CEOCFO: *Is the product available today? Where are you in the process of development and commercialization?*

Mr. Antaki: After four years of R&D we have begun to sell and deliver it. We have a small number of customers mostly in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, because that is where we are located. We are looking to expand distribution of the product to all over the country and then beyond to other countries, primarily through specialist optometrists. We are also working to make seeBOOST available in local optometry retail stores.

CEOCFO: *Where does cost come into play?*

Mr. Antaki: The end user price is \$3,500, which includes everything. You can think of it as expensive prescription glasses. Unfortunately, this is not covered by insurance or Medicare, same as hearing aids. For those persons who have a need to see again, there is nothing remotely effective as seeBOOST. As a technology company, we continue to enhance the product's performance and features to deliver an ever-improving experience to our customers.

CEOCFO: *Why is seeBOOST monocular?*

Mr. Antaki: That is a very good question. Most people think they need both eyes, and that is true as long as you do not have a retinal disease. Monocular is better for most cases of macular degeneration where the person has lost vision in both eyes, not just in one eye. If you lose vision in one eye you can still do everything you want to do. You can still read and drive and watch television and so on. When you lose vision in the second eye things start to go bad in your life in a very bad way. The reason why seeBOOST is monocular and not binocular is precisely because the overwhelming majority of our customers, over ninety percent, have one eye that is much worse than the other eye. It does not help to enhance the worse eye as long as you enhance the better eye. Remember that the better eye is better but still impacted by the disease, and is not normally-seeing. Therefore, we avoid extra weight on the head, extra cost and extra battery power, because an additional seeBOOST on the worse eye does not deliver any benefit. That notion is counter intuitive, but our monocular concept is proven and supported by years of clinical research. People have no trouble adapting to one improved eye versus two. The other truly amazing effect that we discovered, although I have to admit it was not by design, is that when you are wearing seeBOOST in the real world, the social acceptance is almost instantaneous. When you are interacting with other people, such as conversing, playing cards, being at church, involved in social interactions, playing with the grand kids or great grand kids, your worse eye is uncovered and appears natural to the others around you. That makes the other people more comfortable looking at you and interacting with you in a normal and natural human manner. If both of your eyes were covered up, that interaction would greatly suffer. This was an unanticipated bonus benefit of our monocular approach which we learned about from our customers' feedback.

CEOFCO: *What has been the response from the ophthalmology community?*

Mr. Antaki: The retinal ophthalmologists have been very positive. It is very common for these practitioners to have to tell their patients, "Sorry, but there is nothing we can do, come back in six months and we'll keep an eye on it." There is indeed nothing they can do from a therapeutic or medical standpoint. However, seeBOOST is an assistive device which mitigates the effects of vision loss via a prosthetic approach. Quite a few ophthalmologists are referring their patients to us, because they want to give these people an option to try to regain some of their lost sight and quality of life.

CEOFCO: *What is the plan to get beyond Texas?*

Mr. Antaki: We are working to outfit and train low vision optometrists who will be the first marketers outside of Texas for our products. We are also working with the Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind who will redistribute seeBOOST to other Lighthouses for the Blind around the country. Then as I mentioned, about a year from now we are working to try to get into large optometry chains which will make seeBOOST available on a much larger scale. That is going to take time to develop, but our goal is to have seeBOOST accessible as easily as regular prescription glasses for the normally-sighted.

CEOFCO: *Are you seeking funding or partnerships or investments?*

Mr. Antaki: Absolutely, we are! We are a high technology medical device startup. We have raised some equity investment already and as with any company of our type we are continuing to raise additional funding for market expansion. We are talking to a number of strategic partners.

CEOFCO: *Do you find that because it is relatively easy to understand that it is easier to garner attention when there are often medical devices that seem a little convoluted to the average person?*

Mr. Antaki: Our seeBOOST story is easy to tell, and I am always amazed by how many people I meet who know someone who is coping with vision loss due to these diseases. Luckily for us, seeBOOST does not require FDA pre-approval, which makes it that much easier from an investment standpoint. Strangely, we have had a lack of interest from traditional venture capital firms. I believe that there is a strong age bias in that industry. Our customers are old and blind and that is just not a sexy story for the younger investment folks. That's unfortunate, because ours is a very good financial story as well as a great advance for these impaired persons who have no other alternatives.

CEOFCO: *Would you tell us about being recognized recently at the Silmo d'Or Eyewear Trade Show in Paris?*

Mr. Antaki: This is the oldest and most prestigious eyewear trade show in the world. Being in Paris, of course, it is certainly where much of the world's industry goes to visit, so we received invaluable exposure. Silmo has an award for the best new product in the low vision category. We entered seeBOOST and won. We competed with all of our major established competitors. This award validates our unique and novel design assumptions incorporated into seeBOOST. Assumptions like: visually impaired elderly persons need practical solutions, not pure technology solutions. By practical, I mean things like it has got to be lightweight, it has got to work without side effects such as headaches and nausea, it must be usable for extended periods of time, it has to allow you to continue to benefit from your unimpacted peripheral vision without covering it up, etc. The human factors aspects of seeBOOST are what ultimately matter to our users, not just the technology. We were very happy that we successfully passed through the gauntlet of a very tough ten-person jury of professionals in this field in Paris - the French are very finicky when it comes to human factors and design, and are not as easily swayed by technology alone. We won by an overwhelming majority of the vote because our product was recognized as a quantum leap over the past by truly making a difference in the life of our users - I might add, a first in this industry.

CEOFCO: *What is the takeaway? What should people remember about Evergaze and seeBOOST?*

Mr. Antaki: Everyone has parents, grandparents and great grandparents. These older persons are potentially subject to these eye diseases. The key takeaway is this: seeBOOST is a practical alternative to going blind from macular degeneration or diabetes.

