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PediaVision Holdings of Lake Mary's device screens young kids' vision

By Jennifer Larino | Sentinel Staff Writer

David Melnik seems to have a knack for developing products that make someone's life easier.

In the 1990s, his company Kinetics Inc. produced airport check-in kiosks that were soon serving more than 200 million airline passengers a year.

"I decided I wanted to build a self-service network, and I had no business deciding that I should do that," said Melnik, whose résumé when he founded that company in 1989 amounted to a few college-level courses in marine biology and some restaurant work.

Kinetics, which eventually employed more than 100 workers, later dabbled in retina- or fingerprint-scanning systems geared toward frequent fliers who wanted to bypass airport security lines, though the airlines using his self-serve kiosks didn't take to the idea at the time.

Melnik, 44, sold [Lake Mary](#)-based Kinetics in 2004 to giant [NCR Corp.](#) for \$26 million.

Now he is back in the technology business, this time as chief executive officer of Lake Mary-based PediaVision Holdings LLC.

The company is the only U.S. provider of what Melnik calls the PediaVision Assessment Solution, a hand-held vision screener that detects things such as nearsightedness, lazy eye or cataracts in children as young as 6 months old.

Melnik funded the startup through his private investment company, Venturecore Holdings LLC. Three former Kinetics employees have joined him in the 10-person company.

PediaVision obtained a license for the device's infrared-camera technology from a German manufacturer, Plus- optix, then developed a simple screening software to go with it.

Plusoptix originally marketed its technology as an alternative to the standard "automated refractors" used by ophthalmologists to examine people's eyes.

PediaVision plans to target pediatricians and school nurses instead. Screening young children, especially those younger than 4, has always been difficult for doctors. Babies squirm and cry when lights or instruments are brought near their eyes, and they can't read eye charts.

How it works

The PediaVision device, on the other hand, looks like a radar gun with a smiley face painted on the front.

The user points it at a patient from three feet away, presses a trigger and, while audible beeps draw the patient's attention, infrared light is flashed in the patient's eyes.

The device measures the light bouncing back as well as how well the patient's pupils align.

In about a minute, the system produces a detailed vision-screening certificate that notes problem areas in red. Anyone "who can type and hold their hand steady" can use it, Melnik said.

About 13.5 million U.S. children younger than 17 had vision problems in 2003, according to the most recent vision data from the federal [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)'s National Health Interview Survey.

The agency estimates each of those children will incur an average of more than \$500,000 in costs related to vision.

Fast, widely available screening could reduce those long-term costs, Melnik said.

"We want to take all this screening stuff that goes on and make it so that it's a very smooth walk through," he said.

Pediatricians interested

PediaVision's device is gaining attention mostly from pediatricians. Fifty of them have been sold to U.S. medical professionals since the product was launched in October.

The device has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and Medicaid may start covering the cost of the service by the end of the year.

Most private health insurers don't cover its use, however, choosing instead less-expensive eye charts or the medical screenings included in annual physicals.

Dr. Miles Landis, a pediatrician at Lake Mary Pediatrics, appreciates how easy it is to use the PediaVision device on a young patient. The practice has one in both its Orange City and Lake Mary offices.

"It's actually fun to do, which is unusual in pediatrics," he said.

Landis offers the screening to parents of all patients younger than 4 for \$18 "per click." About 75 percent of the parents want the screening, he said.

Detect, then correct

The key is detecting a problem before it becomes permanent, said Dr. Robert Gold, a pediatric ophthalmologist at Eye Physicians of Central Florida and a member of PediaVision's medical advisory board.

For instance, some cases of amblyopia, or lazy eye, can be corrected in young children by placing an eye patch on the good eye for several weeks.

Gold tested the product before it hit the market and thinks the device could be particularly useful for public-school screenings, during which hundreds of students a day are tested.

"It's something that you would teach the pediatrician, who can teach their nurses; they can teach school nurses," Gold said.

Melnik wants to make the device's shell even smaller and add to the types of measurements it can perform.

He said the company may also start developing body-mass index and diabetes screenings.

At day's end, the work at PediaVision is a little less money-oriented than his airline kiosks were, he said.

"I could always go back and say, 'Well, if all we do is save one child's eyesight, then it's a successful business,'" Melnik said. "What value do you put on that?"

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David Melnik: PediaVision Assessment Solution chief executive

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Who is David Melnik?

Age: 44

Hometown: Miami

Company: PediaVision Holdings LLC, [Lake Mary](#)

Title: President and chief executive officer

Work history: Founder and CEO of Kinetics, which sold airport check-in kiosks in the 1990s; sold company to [NCR Corp.](#) in 2004. Co-founder and manager of Venturecore Holdings LLC, an investment company with interests in PediaVision and in Try Running Kids, a company that develops educational-entertainment programs to help children learn and exercise at school.

Philanthropy: Founder in 2003 of Touch Your World, a Seminole County-based nonprofit foundation that promotes community service among area young people.

Family: Wife, Cindy; son, Taylor, 16; daughter, Mikayla, 13.

Fun fact: As a teen, Melnik was the first male to work as a dolphin trainer for the Miami Seaquarium's Flipper Dolphin Show. "It was a great life, wearing flip-flops and shorts, and making vitamin sandwiches out of fish for the dolphins," Melnik said.

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