



## George Mueller

George Mueller has led several companies from start-up to profitability, public offering, or successful acquisition. Mueller co-founded Color Kinetics in 1997, serving as CEO for eight years and chairman for ten years, through its public offering and 2006 acquisition by Philips. Recently, he founded several new ventures, among them EcoSense Lighting, billed as a new generation of economical, environmentally responsible lighting solutions for commercial and residential applications. *Lighting&Sound America* recently spoke to Mueller about his latest project.

**Lighting&Sound America:** How long have you been working on EcoSense? What market niche are you trying to fill?

**George Mueller:** I've been working on EcoSense for about a year, and publicly since this year's Lightfair. I wanted to come back into the lighting industry; I had a non-compete agreement [with Color Kinetics] that lasted a year, but I've kept my contacts. The lighting market is coming to this new digital semiconductor technology. At Color Kinetics, we pioneered the use of LEDs in the colored lighting market. Now LEDs are disrupting the larger white-light market. At EcoSense Lighting, we are targeting the specifier grade lighting market, just the white part.

**LSA:** How is the industry doing in terms of becoming greener and more efficient?

**GM:** LEDs and environmental regulations are becoming much more important all over the world. The Obama administration, states such as California, and many countries around the world are mandating some pretty stringent lighting standards and regulations in terms of efficiency. LED lighting is much more environmentally friendly than most other forms of traditional lighting. It has a significant power savings, compared to incandescent and halogen bulbs. We joke that some of these bulbs, the halogen and incandescent bulbs, are just heaters that happen to put out light, but they are a historical standard and are over 50% of the installed bulbs and tubes out there. This new push is to remove these wasteful "heaters" and move to more energy-efficient lighting technologies based on LEDs

**LSA:** Are EcoSense products currently available? Where are they manufactured?

**GM:** We currently have roughly 14 products in development, a mixture of fixtures and some replacement bulbs, that will ship over the next few quarters. We polled the lighting specifier community and have talked to them, and we've found there's a pretty clear

call from the design community for a manufacturer who can produce a high level of performance, coupled with a high level of quality, delivered at a reasonable price from professionals that they know and trust.

**LSA:** Do you see EcoSense as competing with Color Kinetics?

**GM:** No. Especially not in the color and controlled LED lighting space. As of now, we do not intend to go into that space. We are focused on white LED lighting that is in the mid-to-high-end, specifier-grade portion of the lighting market. That said, the lighting market is large and Philips competes at all levels, so there may be some crossover, but I don't expect much.

**LSA:** What's it like working once again on a startup?

**GM:** It is really exciting. I love it. This will be my third true tech startup and is definitely at the stage where my entrepreneurial skills are best suited. It is exciting to be in the action of taking an idea from a kitchen table to a full company with an established brand, or a product from an idea or concept to the market. I love putting together a team of highly talented people and partners with whom I enjoy doing business. I am not coming back into this because I need to—I truly enjoy the market, I like the people we do business, our worldwide partners, the specifiers, and our employees. Plus this is a really big market, on the order of \$100 billion, and it is moving from an old analog brass, gas, and glass era to one dominated by this new efficient semiconductor technology. Back when we first started Color Kinetics, many people laughed at LEDs, saying that they were only good for signage, displays, and indicator applications; now I would estimate that more than half of the color lighting applications are done with LEDs. LEDs are about to do this to the larger white light market, too. It is like saying that typewriters are about to turn over to computers or land line phones to cellular phones. Do you want to be a part of it? I most certainly do! 📶