Sea2See Eyewear: Sustainable Products with a Conscience Conscience

François van den Abeele, Sea2See Eyewear
Spain

Call to Action

Learn how you can turn a problem into a new business: check out the Sea2See's sustainable products: www.sea2see.org.

Values

- Innovative
- Creative
- Entrepreneurial
- Environmentalist

Lessons Learned

Technology can be used to solve some of our most challenging environmental problems.

Communication and collaboration among nations around the world is essential in the 21st century.

Communications skills as well as technical skills are needed in order to solve the global problems we are currently facing.

"You don't just get out of bed one day and say 'I want to manufacture eyeglasses out of plastic waste'," says François van den Abeele.

His vision for cleaning up the plastic in the oceans was ambitious, but it was not unrealistic. He'd worked with impact businesses before. And as a journalist and documentarian, he had covered social and environmental issues in roughly 130 countries - including in many of the world's most vulnerable regions, in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. The crisis of plastic pollution in waterways was always at the top of the list.

François created Sea2See, an innovative sustainable business that is addressing the planet's most universal and most pressing environmental issue. Sea2See gathers plastic waste from the ocean and transforms it into affordable consumer goods - including eyeglasses and wristwatches. As of March 2021, Sea2See has collected 443 tons of plastic from oceans and waterways in Spain, France, and Africa.

Language Arts

Sea2See uses a process called depolymerization with the trash they collect. Read this article[1] and this article[2] about depolymerization. Create a school-friendly graphic summary of both articles.

Watch Javier Bardem's video[3] about his experience with Sea2See. Then create a five-minute video (it can be a live video or an animated one) about what your venture would look like if you were to find a way to tackle plastic pollution in the ocean.

Write a short (one-act) play, or a short story in which you tell the story of François and the African fishermen he works with; tell it from the point of view of one of the fishermen.

What other uses can you come up with for plastic waste? Choose a business you are interested in (it can involve fashion, building materials, automotive parts, or something else). Imagine how you would use plastic waste as part of the manufacturing process. Then create a three-minute pitch[4] to convince imaginary investors to invest in your idea.

STEM Activities

**Using page 42 of this Plastic Pollution Curriculum guide[5], ** explore the properties of different types of plastics. Then, examine some common plastics and perform tests to identify them.

Select a product that contains plastic in its packaging, and develop a new or alternative type of packaging for the product.

Think about how François found a way to reuse plastic waste to make eyeglasses; then think of another product that could be created from plastic waste. Next, gather some plastic waste from your home and build a prototype of your idea. Keep in mind which types of plastics could be used to make the product, and what their properties are.

Sustainability Innovations

Sea2See is an example of a business that has addressed one of the world's largest issues and created a product that appeals to the younger generation from a fashion and social activist standpoint. Plastic for Change[6] helps businesses address plastic neutrality and plastic offsets within their business model.

Like Sea2See, there are many U.S.-based businesses that have identified the eyeglass industry as a focus for environmental and social improvements. Proof Eyewear[7], based in Boise, Idaho, creates glasses from repurposed skateboard and FSC-certified wood. (FSC-certified is the "gold standard" to describe wood that has been responsibly managed and that offers social, economic, and environmental benefits.) In addition to their products, Proof Eyewear plants five trees for every pair of glasses they sell, assists in health screening in underprivileged communities, and participates in many other positive initiatives.

Visit the Sea2See website[8] and learn about their WAVES approach to sustainability. What does each letter in the WAVES acronym stand for? Which is the most important to you?

What are bioplastics? Review this article[9], which addresses the difference between bioplastics and plastics and explains how bioplastics can shift the future of the plastics industry.

Sustainability Career Pathways

Circular Economy Entrepreneur. As we change the ways we consume and do business, there will many opportunities to help create a fully circular economy, one in which products are designed to last, and waste products become the material for future products. Do you want to be part of that revolution? Would you like to design fully circular sunglasses, phones, sneakers, furniture, and other products? Want to learn about more inspiring circular economy entrepreneur stories to get your creative juices percolating and help you discover your niche? Read here[10].

Sustainable Fashion Industry. New clothes and apparel will continue to be made, of course, but they can be made sustainably. Materials like organic cotton or recycled plastics can be utilized, and designed in a way that the apparel at the end of its (ideally long) lifespans can be recycled or composted (by not mixing natural and synthetic fibers). Here is a great introduction to the field[11]. And an article on the many ways sustainability is shaping the future of the fashion industry[12].

Environmental Journalist. Many people who love to write make a career as a full-time journalist. Some dedicate their writing to chronicling the many environmental problems we face, as well as exploring the many innovative solutions to our sustainability challenges that are being developed. Some are freelancers, pitching stories to a variety of outlets. Others work full time for a news outlet, or with nonprofits, or even government offices. To learn more about this career, read here[13]. And here's a valuable resource: the Society of Environmental Journalists[14], which offers job boards, mentoring, annual conferences, and listservs for environmental journalists.

1 https://energydigital.com/smart-energy/itronic-successfully-tests-manganese-recovery-process
2 https://academickids.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Thermal_depolymerization
3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWNgtblRIvU
4 https://www.marcstoiber.com/compelling-three-minute-pitch/
5 https://seagrant.psu.edu/sites/default/files/Lessons%20for%20NIE%202%20and%203%205GyresALLACTIVITIESPlasticPollutionCurriculum.pdf
6 https://www.plasticsforchange.org/blog/category/plastics-for-change-is-now-an-ocean-bound-plastic-certified-collector#:~:text=Introduced%20in%202020%20by%20Zero,adhere%20to%20fair%20trade%20guidelines
7 https://www.iwantproof.com/pages/do-good-program
8 https://www.sea2see.org/pages/our-aproach
9 https://www.biopak.com/sg/resources/bioplastic-vs-regular-plastic#:~:text=Conventional%20plastics%2C%20such%20as%20fossil,%2C%20recycled%20food%20waste%2C%20etc
10 https://medium.com/age-of-awareness/10-circular-entrepreneurs-in-europe-with-a-passion-for-sustainability-8fb221a37529
11 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_fashion
12 https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/sustainable-fashion-jobs
13 https://therevelator.org/environmental-journalism/
14 https://www.sej.org/