

Tech company that makes iPhone cables has pivoted to ventilators amid coronavirus crisis

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The company that makes your iPhone charging cable and home router is joining in on the coronavirus fight. Belkin International has started making what it calls "low-cost" ventilators at manufacturing plants in

Providence, Rhode Island.

These are sub-\$200 units aimed for emergencies and less severe cases of COVID-19, compared to more full-featured units that cost in the tens of thousands of dollars.

"This is one of the most urgent humanitarian crises we have experienced in our lifetimes and the number one responsibility for each of us in this moment is the care and compassion for others in need," said Chet Pipkin, CEO and founder of Belkin.

Belkin isn't the only tech firm helping with the coronavirus fight. Apple has begun delivering on its promise of providing 20 million [face masks](#) for medical workers and has shipped 2 million face shield for first responders—and posted its shield design online for other manufacturers. Google sourced 49,000 face shields which it donated to San Francisco Bay Area hospitals. Automakers Ford and General Motors are both making ventilators.

The pandemic has claimed the lives of about 80,000 people in the United States, where there have been more than 1.3 million reported cases according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Many governors have said they are in dire need of more ventilators.

The response to COVID-19 showed the world that there will be a need for ventilators, after the pandemic, Pipkin says. "It showed that things can happen that are completely unexpected and at a scale that very few of us were able to imagine, or appreciate."

Belkin is a unit of FoxConn, the giant Taiwan company that's best known for manufacturing iPhones at its Shenzhen plant.

"It was obvious there's a critical need for ventilators and not just for the short term," says Pipkin. "We have no excuse not get prepared."

Los Angeles-based Belkin churns out lots of cables, routers under the Linksys brand, the Wemo products for smart homes and wireless chargers. It's looking to make at least 10,000 ventilators.

So how did it learn how to go outside of their zone to medical supplies?

"We felt a responsibility to be helpful to others," he says, but acknowledges that Belkin didn't have the expertise to design a [ventilator](#). "We reached out to the network," and found experts to guide the way.

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Grainger College of Engineering had the design, and Belkin also consulted with Carle Health of Urbana, Illinois for what's being called the FlexVent. It's under production now, but pending the review and approval of its Emergency Use Authorization application by the Food and Drug Administration.

Belkin's pitch: the FlexVent will be used as a single-use emergency ventilator that can provide constant-flow, pressure-cycled ventilation automatically to patients in respiratory distress.

Charles Dennis, Carle's chief medical officer, says that while he's seeing a flattening of the curve locally in Urbana, Illinois where the health system is located, and the system has enough ventilators for now, he's concerned COVID-19 will come roaring back in the summer and fall.

"It's prudent for us to prepare for potential surges," he says.

Having the lower-cost ventilators available will help with lower risk patients, while keeping the more expensive, full-duty ventilators on reserve for patients with greater need," he says.

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