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Cop-speak
Technology company adds text-to-voice readers to computers in police cruisers

by Dale M. King

Police officers are constantly reminding civilian drivers to keep their eyes on the road.
But those same officers must often glance away from the windshield to check laptop computers in their cruisers for information about potential vehicle offenders.
Jeff Rubenstein, a reserve officer for the Delray Beach department, took note of this potentially dangerous dilemma when he first joined the force.

Software
As a result, he developed software that would give the silent computer on the seat next to him a voice. He adapted it for his own cruiser, but other officers noticed and asked if he could do the same for them.
Today, Rubenstein and partners, Tommy Lopez and Jack Siney, operate Advanced Public Safety (APS), a firm that provides specialized vocal and printing software to more than 200 police departments across the nation – from South Florida to Alaska.
"We literally started this business in Jeff's dining room in Boca Raton," said Lopez, himself a former police officer. Siney had a job in the private sector when he signed on with Rubenstein and Lopez.

25 employees
A year ago, they moved APS to a new office in Deerfield Beach. It started with four employees – and now has 25.
Rubenstein, an attorney who rose to the presidency of CyberGate, an Internet service provider, actually left that firm in 1997 and went to work for one of his competitors, Cenetec, operated by Scott Adams of Boca Raton.
With some free time on his hands, he signed on to work as auxiliary officer in Delray Beach.
He said he was approached by Delray Police Major William McCollom to help solve the problem of trying to drive and read computers at the same time.
"Technology was in our cars, but it was not meeting our goals," McCollom said.
To read out information on the computer screen, McCollom said, "They had to read the screen, which takes their eyes off the offending vehicle, which is a very bad situation."
As a result, Rubenstein came up with a voice reader that he said works with all types

of law enforcement computers. An officer simply enters the license number of a car or a driver's license number and the computer reads out the type of car, whether it is stolen and whether the tag is up to date.

Lopez noted that if the car in question turns out to be stolen or is owned by someone with a bad reputation with the law, the computer blasts a loud alert to tell the officer he may be about to encounter trouble.

On its Web site, APS lists all the departments that are using the system – and they range from coast to coast.

Delray Beach is happy with its system, McCollom said. The Broward County Sheriff's Office uses the same system. And the some of the same technology.

APS didn't stop after coming up with its QuickVoice text-to-speech system, said Lopez. Just a few weeks ago, the firm began offering QuickCommand software that will allow the officer to speak the number of the license plate rather than punch it into the computer keyboard. He said the firm could have come up with it sooner, but had troubles finding a microphone that worked properly.

The company has other "Quick" products in its arsenal of law enforcement gear. The APS "QuickTicket" printer connects to the computer and prints out an electronic traffic citation in less than 30 seconds.

Not only is it fast, Lopez said, it is legible. Judges in the tri-county area complain that dozens of tickets have to be thrown out because the officer's handwriting is illegible. A citation from "QuickTicket" is letter-perfect.

There is also a hand-held model called "PocketCitation" that can be attached to a bicycle or motorcycle.

In addition to printing tickets, the computers also send a record of the citation to the court.

The partners in APS are looking to expand their business and to improve their systems. In the works, said Rubenstein, is a program that would allow police departments to keep track of their cruisers automatically with global positioning technology.

Also being developed are hand-held printers for use by fire rescue teams for inspections and medical calls.

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