



Delray officer develops technology for faster, safer stops

Volunteer police officer Jeff Rubenstein was frustrated with how long it took to get information on a speeder or traffic violator he pulled over.

So, using his technology background, he developed a computer program for patrol cars that reads aloud important information in seconds. It then can print tickets from a small printer in the police cruiser.

Now, about two dozen law enforcement agencies around the state are using the voice response software, called **Virtual Partner**, and praising it for making traffic stops safer and faster. Rubenstein's company, Advanced Public Safety Inc. of Boca Raton, plans to sell the technology nationwide.

"It makes it very simple for the deputy," said Capt. Mike Samec of the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office in northeast Florida. "Once he types in a tag number he doesn't have to do any more. He can listen and keep his eye on the driver or the passengers."

Most patrol cars have computers with mobile data systems so officers

can get driver and vehicle information from the road.

While patrolling the roads or during a traffic stop, officers type in a license plate number and scroll down the screen looking for pertinent information, such as when a tag expires. They have to place the driver's license number of the registered owner into another query to get more information.

"That's all we have to do while driving, which is very dangerous," Rubenstein said. Plus, because of the sun's glare, "you can't see the laptop during the day."

With **Virtual Partner**, an officer enters a tag number and the software runs several queries simultaneously. Seconds later, a computerized voice verbally reads back the car's description and if it's stolen. It also says if the driver is a habitual traffic offender, has a valid license and registration or is wanted on an arrest warrant.

"Those are all things an officer needs to know before he gets to a car," said Aventura Police Chief Tom Ribel. "That's a big advantage."

Virtual Partner costs \$99 to \$399 per vehicle, depending on the size of the force. Additional QuickTicket and QuickCrash programs automatically fill in and print citations. The software is compatible with any police data system.

Officers in Aventura in Miami-Dade County are writing twice as many traffic tickets.

"You can write multiple tickets in seconds as opposed to being at a traffic stop for 10 to 15 minutes," said officer Nick Darpino.

He said he felt safer on the overnight shift, when more traffic offenders are on the road and it's difficult to see inside a stopped vehicle.

"If you get a hit on any kind of warrant you can have another unit come by before you even go up there," he said. "You can increase your safety before even making contact."

Rubenstein, an attorney and technology executive, became an auxiliary officer in 1997. After his company was sold, he began patrolling four days a week. Last year, he asked the Delray Beach Police Department if he could design a more user-friendly program.

He worked with two Delray Beach officers who tested the system in the field. The final product was installed in the department's patrol cars last fall.

"The whole concept was designed by cops," Rubenstein said. "It's everything an officer would want."

Rubenstein has gotten calls from departments in Georgia, Texas and Virginia.

But he said he didn't expect the program he designed on computers at his dining room table to catch on with other agencies.

"I didn't intend this to be a business," he said. "I was doing this to help out the department to make our jobs safer and easier on the road."

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