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Bytes

Computers talk back to cops; OutStart's flying lessons

Orlando Business Journal by Chad Eric Watt

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Chad Eric Watt

Police in Orlando will soon be equipped with a new crime-fighting tool, courtesy of a Boca Raton software company.

Advanced Public Safety Inc. has a contract to deploy its Virtual Partner software to help police handle all the information now within their reach. "It doesn't replace what they have," says company President Jack Siney. "It provides enhancements."

For instance, an officer following a car can query state databases with that car's license plate number. Instead of glancing over at a screen to scan through lines of vehicle and registration information, the Virtual Partner software does the scanning.

Then it speaks.

When something is amiss, such as an expired registration or an outstanding warrant for the auto's owner, the machine speaks up a little louder.

Beyond scanning records, the computer can help with creating new records. In writing tickets and completing investigation reports, police often spend hours filling out repetitive forms.

The Virtual Partner looks out for some of those details and can fill in the obvious ones, such as name, birthdate, address and the like.

Beyond Orlando, the Virtual Partner is on board in a number of Florida agencies,

including the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office and police departments in Delray Beach, Boca Raton and West Palm Beach.

OutStart expands. A British helicopter company has awarded a million-dollar contract to e-learning outfit OutStart Inc.

Founded in Central Florida, the company has engineering and technical operations in Lake Mary, with its headquarters in the Boston area.

Westland Helicopter Ltd. has awarded OutStart the contract to develop a system for training British soldiers.

Specifically, the training system is a part of something known as the Bowman Programme, an initiative to provide secure digital voice and data communications to the British armed forces.

The Bowman Programme is based on an integrated communications system developed for the Canadian military.

OutStart has spent the last 18 months developing something of a focus in defense and aerospace. It's landed contracts with Boeing Co., Lockheed Martin Co. and the U.S. Navy.

That experience helped get it on the Bowman Programme, says company CEO Massood Zarrabian.

"It was very important that we've worked in defense and aerospace," he says.

For one thing, the experience led OutStart to build mobile and disconnected learning tools.

For security reasons, an always-on connection to the Internet is not allowed at some spots in the military. The company developed a connect-and-download variation on its Web-based training tools to fit that situation.

Further, OutStart has acquired a Raleigh, N.C., business with 10 years history in the very young e-learning field.

"I call them a grandfather in the business," Zarrabian says.

The company, called Trainersoft, makes authoring tools for e-learning, much like OutStart.

Unlike OutStart, which targets large companies, Trainersoft targets small businesses and departments within larger organizations.

The acquisition, and eventual linkage of OutStart and Trainersoft tools, will help the

company expand its target market by two or three times.

In some instances, OutStart is finding large operations that have tools from both operations already on board. That's not unusual: There's been a debate raging over whether to buy single companywide learning/training systems or specific tools for a particular department or group.

The best fit is going to depend on the operation, Zarrabian says.

And with the acquisition of Trainersoft, OutStart will have both answers.

Riptide award. The company recently dubbed the fastest-growing technology company across the Interstate 4 corridor has garnered another award  for its work with the Space Shuttle program.

Riptide Software has received the Space Act Award, for software it developed to help get the shuttle fleet ready for launch.

The software is designed to improve efficiency in what NASA folks call "Space Shuttle processing."

The Space Act awards date back to the federal 1958 Space Act to reward innovation and inventions that contribute to NASA's space and aeronautical goals.

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