

A vision of safety, new technology for law enforcement VisionTEK makes it easier to make the world a little safer

By Erika Stutzman
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A small tech firm in Superior eases the workload for people who work to make the world a little safer for the rest of us.

With a new major contract and a surge in interest nationwide in increasing public safety, the market could open wide for the 22-employee firm.

VisionTEK's technology can now be found on laptop computers in thousands of patrol cars dotting the U.S. landscape. Its users can use the programs to research potential bad guys and girls, file reports, and communicate wirelessly with other agencies.

"This technology has been very helpful to law enforcement," said Frank Traylor, president and chief executive of VisionTEK.

Since the Sept. 11 attacks, there has been a rise in interest on behalf of the public and public safety officials in improving communications between law enforcement agencies.

In former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge's case — as the new head of Homeland Security — that means making enormous bureaucracies like the FBI and the rest of the Justice Department talk to each other.

On a microcosm level, it could mean small community police departments talking amongst each other. In the middle, there are regional responses — for instance federal, state and local officers could easily communicate about the same incident or threat to a specific area.

And VisionTEK hopes to be one of the companies that can help these various agencies do just that.

"With a growing focus on security and public safety now, we hope that it's going to be a matter of how fast we want to grow," Traylor said.



Frank Traylor, president and CEO of VisionTEK, is pictured in his office with a Toughbook laptop computer designed for law enforcement officers. VisionTEK designs software that allows officers to work from laptops in their cars.

It's a growth spurt that could finally put the quiet company on the map — though it has been quietly successful for several years, and is now profitable.

Vice President of Sales Carroll Allison says laptops using VisionTEK's software are in 2,500 cars around the country, for agencies ranging from Louisville in Boulder County, to the whole of Lee County, Fla., which has 450 patrol cars on the road.

VisionTEK was recently selected to provide a Universal Booking Systems to a consortium in southwest Florida that comprises the state attorney's office, the courts and public defender's office.

Kris Brooks, the project manager for the consortium, said it has "worked long and hard to provide its members with a state-of-the-art booking system."

Brooks said that VisionTEK's systems will make the upgraded booking system a reality, and is expected to be installed by mid-2002.

"We will be able to book suspects faster and with fewer errors in the process, than ever before," Brooks said.

VisionTEK was founded in 1994, primarily to convert hard copies and electronic data to data for mobile devices. Last year, it relocated from its Boulder offices to an office suite on McCaslin Boulevard in Superior.

In 1995, the federal funding program Cops MORE was launched — from 1994-2000 the program had already awarded about \$1 billion to law enforcement agencies to buy technology and equipment. Another \$81 million was available in 2001.

VisionTEK quickly shifted gears to take advantage of that market. In 1995, the firm launched FrontLine, its flagship technology.

So far the company's sales have mostly relied on word-of-mouth marketing, which can be successful with close-knit communities like law enforcement.

But they're hoping for more ramp — and that includes increasing their sales and marketing efforts.

"We've been doubling revenues each year," Traylor said. "We're shooting for more like three- to five-percent growth rates in upcoming years."

Which isn't chump change. Allison says he is handling about \$18 million in contracts now, and hopes to approximately double the staff next year.

Allison said he knows first-hand how much tedious paperwork can bog down the practice of law enforcement. He spent 14 years in law enforcement, and was a lieutenant in the Boulder Sheriff's Department.

"The State Patrol has done studies that show officers who report on fatals (accidents) could be off the street for an entire shift," he said. "With what we do, they can fill out a report while they're still waiting for a tow truck."