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BUSINESSNEWS

Cambridge firm's device sounds alarm on laptop theft

Bizlines/by Cromwell Schubarth Thursday, July 25, 2002

David Lee wants to shake up the laptop computer anti-theft market - literally.

One false move on a laptop equipped with his \$99 device triggers loud warnings, followed by a steady alarm.

Unless you know the code to halt the alarm, the Caveo Anti-Theft device automatically disables the computer and encrypts the data on it. Without the codes to stop the alarms or to unlock it, the computer becomes as useful as a brick and the data on it can't be retrieved, says Lee, the founder of Caveo Technology, in Cambridge.

The key ingredient in the device is a motion sensor Lee helped develop at Analog Devices Inc., where he worked after many years as technology chief at Arthur D. Little Inc., of Cambridge. The Caveo Anti-Theft device is the first of many products that Lee hopes to produce using Analog's motion-detection chips.

"They're our partner on this," Lee says. "Caveo develops the applications which will help sell their chips and they help us to market them."

Since gathering positive industry reviews after launching in April, Lee says Caveo has gained momentum, now selling hundreds of the devices a month.

"We've done OK selling to individuals, but our best market is corporate (information technology) managers who worry about sensitive data falling into the wrong hands," Lee says.

Lee says he's working on a deal with a major computer-accessory company that could push sales even higher.

Other products Caveo hopes to develop include touch-detection systems that museums can use to protect priceless art or a golf club that can analyze your swing.

Caveo has developed a motion-controlled "mouse" for handheld computers.

"The lack of a convenient mouse is a common complaint about handhelds," Lee says. "Our device lets you move the cursor around a screen by tilting it in the direction you want to go and tapping it when it reaches where you want to be."

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Lee says he hopes Caveo's other lines will find a smoother track to market than its anti-theft device, which he had expected to launch last year.

Initially planned as part of the factory-installed equipment in the laptops of a major computer maker, Lee says it fell victim to the high-tech downturn.

``That was in 2000, when the PC market went sour," he says.


``That industry is so competitive that (the manufacturer) couldn't increase (its) price to cover adding our anti-theft device," he says. ``To them it wasn't an added source of revenue. It was a cost."

The setback meant having to redesign the device with its own power source, Lee said.

``That put our progress back about a year, but we're on track now," he says.

Proving that in the motion-control business, as most others, it's important not to get rattled.

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