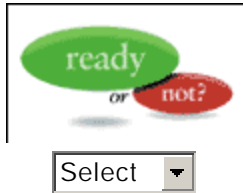


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News

FAST FORWARD

Entrepreneur aims to take to market an alarm system for laptops

By Ross Kerber, Globe Staff, 9/25/2000

W. David Lee has a solution to a rash of laptop thefts: a car alarm for your PC.



He means it literally. A device he hopes to sell to computer makers is based around a motion-detection chip made by Canton-based Analog Devices. The chip is already widely used in car alarms and airbags.

Now Lee, a former consultant for Analog, hopes to take the device a step further with his own company, Caveo Technology LLC in Cambridge.

He says he is in talks with several makers of laptop computers to provide alarm systems for their models that would appear next spring.

Lee's vision includes a flat device measuring 30 millimeters square containing the Analog chip, a speaker, and its own battery. The system would be built directly into laptops or other electronic devices, and would include software to prevent the machine from booting up without the correct passwords.

"It just became obvious to me that something was needed to make these more secure," says Lee, who as Caveo's chief executive and largest shareholder oversees seven employees.

Caveo is hardly alone in the market for laptop security, a topic of much interest as increasing volumes of data are kept only in electronic bits rather than on paper.

Just last week, for instance, an IBM laptop belonging to Irwin Jacobs, chief executive of wireless-chip maker Qualcomm Inc., went missing from a hotel conference room moments after he addressed a conference of business writers in California.



To solve the problem of laptop theft, some competitors sell software that tracks a computer's whereabouts on the Internet, or heavy cable locks customized to bolt onto PCs. Kryptonite Corp. of Canton makes its own motion-detection alarm for laptops, which costs \$60 and provides users with a docking station and a 110-db alarm.

Lee says his solution will be more subtle, combining two of his previous roles.

As former board member of Kryptonite, Lee helped oversee the development of computer-security products. And, as a consultant for Arthur D. Little, Lee was involved in the production of a motion-sensor chip at Analog, in Norwood.

According to the company, the most recent version of the chip, known as the ADXL202E, contains as its prime feature a polysilicon structure suspended above a silicon wafer with tiny springs also made from polysilicon. The suspended mass weighs just 0.7 micrograms. A movement, or acceleration, of the chip can then be determined by measuring the electrical signals generated by the displacement of the suspended structure.

Analog began producing such chips in 1991 and, in addition to automotive-component makers, currently sells many to Microsoft, Sony, Nintendo, and other producers of gear for computer games.

Christophe Lemaire, a marketing manager for the company, said it is also in discussions with makers of cellphones and personal-digital assistants to provide what he calls "gesture recognition."

Imagine, he said, a cellphone that could be hung up with a jiggle, or one that could be shaken just so to dial a particular phone number.

More immediately, Analog and Caveo have developed what Lee calls a "motion-algorithm library," so that an installed chip and its software will be able to tell when a host laptop is just being pushed around a desk, or when it is being carried on the run.

Gail Caldwell, a Caveo vice president, said the alarm can be set to go off when the laptop is carried beyond, for example, a 10-foot perimeter from its original placement.

Prices haven't been set, but Caldwell said the company expects to sell its systems to laptop makers at around \$20 each.

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