

Fast Touch upgrades police data capacity

UGH HALLORAN

When one of the world's biggest defence contractors had problems with a project, it called on the help of one of Australia's smallest technology companies.

In early 2002, BAE Systems asked Perth software company Melix to help with BAE's computer-aided dispatch and communications program for the WA police.

The CADCOM project had been plagued by operational difficulties and was running behind schedule and over its budget.

After two years of work, which included redesigning CADCOM's back-end system, Melix used its experience and some of the \$1.7 million in revenue it earned to develop its Fast Touch program, which it launched at the CeBIT technology exhibition in Sydney last month.

Fast Touch has been designed to enable police command and control centres to send tasks via digital radio, with the police receiving the information on an in-car computer.

The software allows police to check details of suspect people and vehicles with the police database without having to use a radio.

Fast Touch also includes other features like an electronic map of Perth (or any city), in-car video recording and siren and light control.

The program runs on a Panasonic Toughbook loaded with Windows XP, and can be easily upgraded, according to Melix managing director Hiep Nguyen.

Mr Nguyen said that as a result of its development of Fast Touch, Melix was tendering for the next police equipment upgrade.

The Public Mobile Radio Network will replace the current UHF analogue radio network in the Perth metropolitan area with a new voice



Melix men: Chief executive Hiep Nguyen, left, software consultant Sam Wang and software engineer Alex White. The Fast Touch program has been designed to enable police command and control centres to send tasks via digital radio. Picture: Don Palmer

and radio communications network. This will provide secure voice communications, mobile data services and integrated technology to extract information from WAP data systems and automatic vehicle location.

Melix has also demonstrated its software to the Queensland police, the Tasmanian police, fire and ambulance services, as well as the fire services in Perth and Sydney.

Mr Nguyen said these groups had different requirements from the police. Fire services needed access to information on buildings rather than people, and ambulance officers needed medical records.

None of the groups had yet committed to using Fast Touch, but they had given "very positive" responses, and the Queensland police had described it as "the best thing they'd seen", Mr Nguyen said.

Melix chairman John Keay said the company was also looking for business opportunities beyond emergency services so it could get "a little larger a little faster".

"This business is very handy, but it comes in chunks through tenders and so on," Mr Keay said.

"It's feast or famine, so if it's possible to find other opportunities that might allow us to expand into other

areas, that would be good, and we might be able to merge with someone who's got a business that's compatible.

"There must be other little Melixes doing things . . . and it reached a stage where we need to spend a few months now in trying to seriously make other people aware of what's going on while we're waiting for some of these contracts to come on."

Melix showed Fast Touch to Telstra in Tasmania last month after Telstra and the Tasmanian Government began discussions about creating a central government communications portal.

"We hope to go beyond Australia because this type of application is suited to any country," Mr Nguyen said.

Melix has demonstrated Fast Touch to the major military contractors in Australia — BAE, Tenix and Raytheon.

Mr Keay and Mr Nguyen, who together own the majority of stock in the company, co-founded Melix about four years ago, raising about \$400,000 from seed capitalists and private investors in WA and the UK.

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