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A Video GPS Genie

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EverTrac the Future

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By Jeff Sievers

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Imran Anwar's vision is of a world in which video cameras pinpoint where they are, and when a sensitive piece of gear is compromised or moved without authorization, a surveillance video system captures images automatically.



Anwar is the president and CEO of the new technology firm EverTrac. He sees a time in the not-too-distant future when a combination of GPS, wireless video communications, on board computers and miniature cameras team up in a variety of configurations to provide a new level of security for those in the public sector. Think about the lives that could be saved, Anwar says, by a video and GPS-based police dispatching system that intelligently and automatically selects the nearest patrol car with a defibrillator when one is needed, instead of just sending the closest police vehicle.

In a wide-ranging interview in EverTrac's Long Island, NY offices, Anwar, 38, described his view of the convergence of GPS (global positioning satellite system) and video technology.

Location-Awareness Solutions

"Our mission is to provide location-awareness solutions to businesses, consumers, police and ambulance departments. The idea is for everyone to be more effective, secure, efficient or better-served, based upon location information that is relevant. It can be a child's location in a park or the location of a gas station for someone on the road running low on fuel. We provide solutions for indoor and outdoor tracking of people or objects, such as emergency vehicles."

To keep the concept of the new technology understandable, Anwar categorizes a variety of GPS related uses into four distinct types: people, objects, indoor and outdoor. Laughing, he continues, "I daresay that we can show the value of all four types of solutions to the players in Government Video's market." Anwar explains that indoor people location can be as simple as managing the history of the places a patient on a stretcher has been in a hospital. Tied to a video camera and the Internet, the hospital staff could not only know where the patient is and his condition but keep an eye on him remotely as well.

Another example Imran explains, "would be to let parents and security officers at an amusement park track and locate a missing child." Again, these are just the most basic examples of what is possible. For objects, the examples can be anything from tracking the location of a tractor-trailer on the highway for fleet management, to the indoor tracking of assets such as pallets or cartons in a

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warehouse. This is especially valuable in the case of expensive video and computer equipment, Anwar adds.

Tracking Video Equipment

Turning to the outdoor tracking of objects, Anwar says, "Even in traditional broadcast and video industries, companies have significant fleets of vehicles carrying their precious cargo, whether it is video cameras and crews, tons of blank tapes, or even more, finished goods on their way to the customer. These companies need 'traditional' fleet management simply because they do operate a fleet of vehicles, and it can be imperative to ensure that it is operating in the right place, and even in good condition. After all, a video crew cannot be very effective if the vehicle carrying them to an event has an engine blowout that could have been avoided with a good fleet management solution."

Fleet management would help ensure that the infrastructure including vehicles and equipment is performing well and is reliable. Using GPS and video technology it's possible to take that one step further.

He explains, "If you are a director of news or video operations, more than likely you find yourself in situations where you wonder where the video equipment is in the field. Using EverTrac technology you would be able to see, on a map on your screen, where the equipment is physically at any given time. The system could also intelligently help you respond with the best or closest video equipment in the field to an event or an incident scene. Think about your competitive advantage if your system can respond to changing conditions intelligently." In outdoor-object type situations like these, a device with GPS and wireless communications would sense where it is, and transmit the data wirelessly to the software system at the office. This solution is possible even for existing or older equipment and could be built right into future video equipment at the factory.

"We are in discussions with various equipment manufacturers to see if it makes sense for them to embed this technology," Anwar adds.

Privacy Concerns

It's one thing to track equipment and other objects using this technology, but there are obviously privacy concerns in tracking the movement of people—even those on the public payroll.

Anwar responds, "It is interesting you say that, because these days it seems like I cannot go into any hotel lobby, shopping mall, or even convenience store without being videotaped, without my permission. On top of that each time I use my credit card, or go through a tollbooth, I am already being 'tracked.' Imagine how easy and possible it is for anyone to put together a picture of who I am, where I went, with whom, what we bought or ate, and where we went afterwards. So, 'tracking' without our permission is an existing problem, and one that is going to get worse. What we are talking about is not tracking people, but helping people and businesses achieve their legitimate goals making better use of location related information.

EverTrac distributes tracking solutions in a variety of configurations. TracTeam people tracking solutions for example, essentially consist of intelligent contactless ID tags that can talk to the facility wirelessly, by using radio frequency or infrared. This would be used for example, when a person walks in the front door of the office. The tag communicates its presence so the security guard can see the image of the correct person on a video screen and stop the tag holder if the picture does not match.

More importantly, the person can move anywhere in the building that he has access to. If he approaches an area he does not have authority for, the system can

send an alert to security, or the system itself can announce to the person that he is not permitted to be where he is. If he does not leave immediately, then the security personnel can be called in while the unauthorized person continues to be monitored.

This allows a facility to be made as secure as necessary without necessarily deploying guards all over the building. Similarly, if this person is a supervisor on a factory floor, or a manager on duty in a large warehouse, the system can locate them for the customer to contact quickly without having to wait. "You know how ineffective public address system announcements usually are, when every supervisor or manager on duty assumes someone else took the call, while the customer or visitor waits and grows upset. So, in each of these cases, 'tracking' of the person is not an imposition on their personal freedom but an enabling technology for the business or the team to find other members of the team quickly, effectively and securely."

Security, customer service and effective teamwork require having to find the right people at the right time, especially when we are in an office or business setting, so its easy to see how useful this can be. But what about the outdoors tracking of people?

According to Anwar this again depends on what the goal is. He explains, "Should I be able to track your movements without your permission? Of course not. But, if you and your wife go to the shopping mall, especially a large one, and happen to separate, you can immediately see the need of being able to locate each other. Some cell phones today enable you to do so. Or kids getting lost in an amusement park. Or parents wanting to ensure that their teenager did not take the car into a 'bad neighborhood.'"

Asked how this would relate to someone in the public service arena, Imran answers, "The point is, location awareness for the right person for the right purpose is different from secretly embedding chips and tracking people's personal lives." An example, for government workers can involve going into a hazardous situation where being tracked in real time can help save lives. "I have seen several episodes of police video TV shows where the criminals being chased can lead the officers into totally unknown areas and the officer can only hope to catch the bad guy and not become a victim."

An EverTrac compatible location-aware device worn by a police officer, or a firefighter battling a brush fire can help them be tracked by their backups, and also help find them if their lives are in danger.

"Quite simply, what we need to remember is this.: we are living in an increasingly mobile, wireless, and eBusiness driven world. You have to 'Know Where It's @,' that includes assets in the public sector."

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