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Merlin 360's software casts a spell

Tracking system could be lifesaver

Kathryn Moore

A YORKSHIRE technology firm which specialises in software development is attracting the interest of the US Government and hospitals after developing a revolutionary device which can track people moving around large buildings. Merlin 360, based at Dinnington, near Rotherham, has developed the Ultrasonic Tracking System which tracks people and assets. The system uses an ultrasound device which is smaller than a credit card and is worn by individuals.

The device sends out an ultrasound signal which is picked up by ceiling-based receptors which track individuals' movements and transfers that information back to a central database. In the event of an emergency such as a fire, staff can be located on a screen and directed to an exit. The product could be of particular benefit for the co-ordination of the emergency services. Firefighters, for example, could wear the tracking devices and could be monitored. The system produces 3D images which can detect if a wearer has fallen or is in trouble. Managing director Geoff Berry said: "We had started with a project for a local company, and were considering how the applications could be expanded. I began thinking about the Hillsborough disaster when football fans were being crushed and aid could not reach them quickly enough and how security could be improved."

The ultrasound system has the potential to save lives and has already attracted interest from the NHS and US hospitals. In a hospital environment if a specialist nurse is desperately needed, or a patient has gone missing, the tracking system tells operators where that person is.

The system can also be used with equipment. If a piece of equipment is moved, the system can be used to find its location.

The system could also provide major benefits for businesses – the product can cut the costs of stock management and control – and can help locate staff as well as reducing theft. The potential for the product is huge and it is already attracting the attention of sports stadiums, retailers and health authorities.

The company also specialises in supplying Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) systems. These are small electronic tags which are attached to items to track and trace movement and location. The software links the technology to a company's management system so that every tagged item can be traced.

British Aerospace currently uses RFID systems to tag aircraft parts to provide an audit trail of each individual item.

Commercial Director Russell Conway said: "No other industry is so poised to grow. We are concentrating our efforts locally, assisting SMEs in our region to adopt RFID. Our Ultrasonic Tracking System will soon be ready for market launch, taking Merlin 360 into the global market."

Established in 2002 alongside Merlin's sister company SIS (Specialist IT Services) – the company's turnover has rocketed by 300 per cent and the company expects to increase its workforce from six to 100 in the next three years.

"The possibilities for use are endless and there's no-one else in this area doing what we're doing," Mr Berry added.

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