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Business-UNF partnership may speed security screening

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JACKSONVILLE -- The [University of North Florida](#) and [View Systems Inc.](#) have developed a partnership over the past two years that has produced a high-technology security system that could speed people's trips through security screenings.

SecureScan, which pinpoints weapons and displays them on a computer screen, has already been used at events such as the Academy Awards, the Golden Globes and in Jacksonville at the entrance of the Veterans Memorial Arena for events during the week of Super Bowl XXXIX.

SecureScan was originally patented by the [Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory](#). Once UNF and View Systems teamed up, a newer and more proficient model was made and is now on the market at a cost of \$10,000 a unit.

SecureScan looks like a free-standing doorway and houses 12 small computers and one main computer. Each of the small computers has two sensors that monitor the Earth's magnetic field.

Any metal that disturbs the magnetic field is immediately pinpointed on a still photograph taken while a person walks through the SecureScan frame.

Because SecureScan does not have its own magnetic field like older security portals, it is safe for anyone, including pregnant women and people with pacemakers.

SecureScan eliminates the need for pat-downs and wand scans typically associated with walk-through security systems. Instead, the person monitoring the system knows exactly where a suspect item is and can ask the owner to remove it.

Those not carrying a weapon can complete the SecureScan check in an average of three seconds. This allows SecureScan to average 1,200 people an hour, five times the rate of other airport security portals, which average 220 people an hour.

"The great thing about SecureScan is that it's a hands-free, hassle-free metal detector. You are never touched," said View Systems account executive Charles Nelson.

It also has the ability to discern items that are weapons and those that aren't, such as keys and pocket change, by measuring differences in metallic mass and ferromagnetic composition. In 2003 SecureScan located a small razor blade hidden in a student's mouth at a New York City school.

Gunther Than, CEO of View Systems, said one main market for SecureScan is public and private school systems. The Englewood, Calif., school district has already ordered six units.

So far, View Systems has sold about 80 units and Nelson said other target markets are state correctional facilities, courthouses, sports arenas and mass transit stations.

Than first approached professor John Alexander in the summer of 2003 when he licensed a patent that Alexander had with the [University of Florida](#). Alexander was then teaching at UNF and running the electrical engineering laboratory, where he had hired undergraduates of various levels to work on research grants.

Than then enlisted Alexander and his student research team to build a more modern version of SecureScan. The team worked on installing newer sensors, lessening power usage and cutting manufacturing costs.

"It's a 'demo or die' motto in the lab," said former UNF electrical engineering student John Sarman. If the group was unable to produce a viable demonstration of the projects it was working on, it risked losing its funding.

There was no such worry with the SecureScan project, however, after Than approved the group's newer model. View Systems, based in Baltimore was so impressed with the students' work that it opened a branch office in Jacksonville, where it based four of its five engineers, to continue working with UNF on advancing SecureScan's technology as well as other projects.

The work is priceless for the students involved, Alexander said. "The biggest success for me was getting all the students trained and getting them a successful, real project to learn from."

Graduate student and lab employee David Reed agreed. He said the experience of working on a real project just can't be beaten. Although students do have a bit of leeway for mistakes, the margin of error is small.

"There were real-world things we had to keep in mind," he said. "A lot of time, the ball gets pitched into your hands and you've got to run with it."

Three of the four View Systems engineers in Jacksonville are former UNF engineering students. They were hired upon graduation because of the work they did on SecureScan while students working in the UNF lab.

Sarman has been with View Systems for three months and works primarily on reports, design and writing software for the SecureScan system.

"I'm really excited because View Systems is a newer, small company and it gives me a chance to be creative and innovative without getting tied into large company politics," he said.

Creativity will be apparent in the next stage of SecureScan. Alexander, the lab and View Systems hope to eventually have fingerprint and facial-structure recognition software that will search criminal databases and try to match faces. The group is also looking into powering SecureScan by battery instead of plugging it into a wall socket.

View Systems offers homeland security products to law enforcement, government agencies, educational systems, event and sports venues and more. It plans to continue its partnership with UNF on future projects.

"View Systems has been one of the major private companies that has come in for an extended time," Reed said, "and they've given us a lot of support."

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