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HARDWARE

Optim seeks commercial path for its fiberscopes

BY EFRAIN VISCAROLASAGA
STAFF WRITER

Sturbridge-based **Optim Inc.** has landed a \$500,000 contract with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to provide its newest LED-based fiberscope to agents at the United States' north and south borders.

With a light-emitting diode (LED) on one end of a fiber-optic shaft and an eyepiece on the other, Optim's fiberscopes offer a close-up view of small, dark places otherwise inaccessible by human eyes or hands. For border-control uses, this could include searching dark crevices inside vehicles or looking within sealed packages for drugs, explosives or other contraband. A video camera can also be attached to the eyepiece to record searches for training and court use.

Optim's activity with security and defense agencies — it has also sold units to the Naval

Air Systems Command in Maryland — is keeping revenue flowing. But it also has enabled the company to delve into other applications, such as the medical field, where executives expect to begin shipping product in 2008.

"(The security industry) continues to embrace the technology moving forward, but other markets have been really receptive," said **Thomas Root**, CEO of Optim.

While FreedomView — the law enforcement version of Optim's fiberscope — continues to receive new orders, other applications, including those in the automotive and aviation industries, have begun to generate sales as well. One scope was even sold to a NASCAR Nextel Cup race team for car inspection, while another may be used by reality-TV celebrity mechanic **Jesse James** in an upcoming project.

"I thought aviation would have been a little more interested, but it's coming along,"

Root said. "They are kind of fascinated by the video side, which is more expensive."

Root said Optim's sales have made the 44-person company profitable, but he declined to give specific financial details.

The migration from defense to private-sector technology applications is becoming a more common path for small companies in New England, said Alan Macdonald, executive director of the Massachusetts Defense Technology Initiative. Defense spending, he said, is helping a number of local companies develop and test their products in a military environment while targeting commercial applications.

"It's not just the Raytheons of the world that are benefiting from the increase in defense spending, but the smaller companies as well," Macdonald said.

Westwood's RemoteReality Corp., for example, developed a 360-degree camera for use on tanks and submarines, but now deploys its technology in commercial security in casinos. In Wilmington, portable fuel cell maker Lilliputian Systems Inc. has been working with the Natick Soldier Systems Center on portable fuel cells for soldiers, but is ultimately aimed at bringing its technologies to commercial markets, said Macdonald.

OPTIM INC.

Business: Portable fiberscopes

CEO: Thomas Root

Location: Sturbridge

Employees: 44

Founded: 1994



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