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INNOVATION

A look at innovative organizations, concepts, products and people

FirstWatch Software Plots Hidden Data Trends

TECHNOLOGY: Safety, Fire, Disease Among Uses for Incident Tracking

■ By BRAD GRAVES

Mardi Gras and the Super Bowl in New Orleans. With that city's reputation for craziness, it sounds like mischief is in the making.

An Encinitas company called **FirstWatch**, however, helped New Orleans authorities keep their cool during both events, including the mysterious blackout at the **Mercedes-Benz** Superdome.

FirstWatch writes software. Its code sifts through large amounts of data coming into an area's 911 system, looking for patterns and concentrations of events.

The business has been examining emergency services data for 15 years, selling its services to major cities.

Local governments in San Diego County use it. So do more than 300 public safety agencies in the United States and Canada. The agencies have become customers because they want an extra edge in maintaining situational awareness.

FirstWatch reported \$3 million in revenue last year, and says the business

is growing at a 30 percent clip.

Flexible Software

The software is flexible. The FirstWatch system can be programmed to look for reports of specific things, such as white powder. It can plot incidents on a map. It can keep track of activity in certain zones that a user defines (for example, a 300-yard ring surrounding a hotel with a high percentage of NFL business). And it can compare data to historical trends.

Authorities might be on the lookout for public health emergencies. A sudden spike in reports of headaches and coughing, for example, may indicate a biological attack. A flood of respiratory and gastrointestinal calls may indicate a different kind of bioterror.

After the lights went out in the third quarter of the Ravens-49ers football game, FirstWatch pored over the data in emergency calls and, in short order, ruled out terrorism.

There were no abandoned vehicles near the Superdome and there was no increase in 911 calls, said **Todd Stout**, FirstWatch's president. Stout said the data essentially offered this message: "We're not seeing anything else weird — except it's dark."



Photo courtesy of FirstWatch

More than 300 public safety agencies in the U.S. and Canada use FirstWatch's software, which sifts through large amounts of data coming into an area's 911 system, because they want an extra edge in maintaining situational awareness.

FirstWatch helped authorities in Tampa, Fla. keep watch on their city during the 2012 Republican National Convention, and authorities in Charlotte, N.C. do the same during the 2012 Democratic National Convention. Authorities in Hawaii used the software for spotting trouble during the 2011 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, or APEC, summit.

The New Orleans performance was a repeat of last year, when FirstWatch helped city and federal officials watch Mardi Gras and the NCAA Final Four Basketball Tournament.

Olympic Gold Medal Recovered

The software is responsible for a small victory in Oceanside.

In 2011, crime analysts in that community were mapping a string of burglaries with FirstWatch. As the crime wave continued, a thief broke into the home of athlete **Tristan Gale Geisler** and took her Olympic medal. Geisler won gold in the women's skeleton at Salt Lake City in 2002.

Since Oceanside police were already on the case, they had a head start in solving

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Photo courtesy of FirstWatch

The team at Encinitas-based FirstWatch helped New Orleans authorities keep track of the crowd at Mardi Gras and analyzed the mysterious blackout at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome. After the lights went out during Super Bowl XLVII, FirstWatch pored over the data in emergency calls and were able to quickly rule out terrorism.

Innovation:

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the crime. They quickly recovered the medal.

Stout started FirstWatch in 1998. In its first incarnation, the software looked over call center data from Kansas City, Mo. The original business used code that Stout wrote himself. Since then, the company president says, he has handed the job over to professionals.

He now employs 20 people.

The business expects to evaluate between 18 million and 19 million incidents this year, Stout said. All data flows through FirstWatch's San Diego data center.

In addition to sniffing out crime and terrorism, the software is able to help agencies such as fire departments keep track of performance, including response times.

The company expects revenue to grow to \$4 million this year.

That's pretty good business for a company which, in Stout's words, "sits on top of a database, looking for weird stuff."



Photo courtesy of FirstWatch

Page 4: Locally based FirstWatch writes software code that sifts through large amounts of data coming into an area's 911 system, looking for patterns and concentrations of events.

*Special thanks to the
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