

## New voice reader software helps officers on the beat

By Lisa Napoli

MSNBC — Jeff Rubenstein could have taken the money and run, when the dot-com he led was sold a few years back. But semi-retirement didn't suit him, and he found himself following his bliss: doing more shifts as a volunteer police officer. And because of his restlessness, cops around the country may be a little safer — and crime-fighting, more efficient.

THE STORY BEGINS in south Florida, where Rubenstein, now 31, is trained as an auxiliary cop. An attorney who was once president of CyberGate, an Internet Service Provider sold in 1997, Rubenstein went on to found a business incubator in Boca Raton, Fla.. Then, during what was to be a hiatus from work, Maj. William McCollom of the Delray Beach police department asked his eager volunteer, Officer Rubenstein, to help him solve a problem.

"Like most agencies around the nation, we'd spent an exorbitant amount of money on technology," said McCollom. "Technology was in our cars, but was not meeting our goals." In Rubenstein, McCollom found an eager "entrepreneur/inventor."

The two men looked for a way to speed up the process of a traffic stop, a routine but potentially dangerous part of any officer's job. While laptops in the patrol cars helped an officer digitally gather information on the car and driver he or she had pulled over, deciphering information — quickly — proved challenging.

Sure, these were better days than when cops had to radio in a tag number to home base to get somewhere there to look up further information. Now, the files that are called up on the patrol car computer, explained Rubenstein, contained "a significant amount of information, including: name, age, sex, race, driving record, traffic violations, warrants, insurance information, etcetera." But, he added, "the information is presented in an extremely hard-to-read format and is normally provided in separate files that force the officer to scan through several records."

And if that wasn't bad enough, McCollom said, "it took too long to write a report, creating additional concerns because of officer safety, and then they had to read the screen, which takes their eyes off the offending vehicle, which is a very bad situation."

Rubenstein came up with a voice reader that works with existing law enforcement software that's used across the country. An officer enters a license plate number, or a driver's license number, and the computer reads out what sort of car it's attached to, whether it's stolen, whether the registration is up to date. And whether the person sitting in the passenger seat fits the



Jeff Rubenstein has helped develop a software system for patrol cars that's faster and safer for police officers patrolling the streets.

description of the person who has registered the car.

Should a ticket need to be written, the information gets entered automatically onto a digital form, and printed out in the squad car — reducing the chance for error, and increasing the speed with which an officer conducts business. And, not coincidentally, making it easier to write tickets makes officers likely to write more.

“This way an officer can clear a traffic stop in under five minutes, rather than in twenty,” said Rubenstein. “It’s a huge officer safety issue.”

Rubenstein is now working on a driver’s license reader, not unlike a credit card swipe device at a store, to be installed in squad cars, so that no keystrokes at all would need to be executed. And he’s in the process of marketing the software to police departments across the nation. So far, four other cities in Florida have purchased the software, and Rubenstein said he’s in the beta phase with 20 others in the region. And the cost, he said, is nominal — in the hundreds of dollars per cop.

How to measure the success of the product? McCollom, who started working in the field 19 years ago, back in the age of the “stubby pencil,” said it’s clear: “We went from having a lot of resistance from officers to computer technology to a 100 percent clambering ‘when am I next’ attitude.

As for Rubenstein, he’s finding a way to merge his love of technology with his love of law enforcement. It’s one of those happy times of convergence, when someone’s passion helps other people, when one technology success is helping to spawn another.



Inside the patrol car, a laptop and ticket printer automates -- and expedites -- the filling out of tickets.