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CQL President Mark Lardieri displays an electronic tether tracking device for parolees and a wireless communication device. One of the firm's recent successes is the StreeTime Tracker, a Web-based application linking the two.



CQL Finds Niche

Daniel Schoonmaker
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GRAND RAPIDS — The list of local technology companies able to describe themselves as Microsoft Gold Certified Partners with world class expertise in .NET architecture, SharePoint and SQL database design is far from exclusive. Custom software applications, system integration and even data centers are skill sets of dozens of local firms, all of which are more than competent.

"At the end of the day, a lot of organizations have talented people," said Mark Lardieri, president of CQL Inc. "You can group technology firms so that the discussion becomes commoditized."

This is true of technology in general, Lardieri explained, as all innovations eventually evolve from a strategic or informational application into a commodity. Cell phones are a textbook example: Once a distinguishing acquisition for individuals and companies, cell phones are now purchased largely on price alone, with little discernable difference in the product.

"We want to compete in that strategic or informational layer; IT doesn't have to be a commodity," said Lardieri. "We've looked to differentiate ourselves in our ethics and with a get-it-done attitude, and by looking at

some of the Microsoft technologies that others have not been spending a lot of time with."

With this in mind, CQL, which derives its name from Microsoft's SQL database product, established itself as one of a handful of contributors to pre-Beta incarnations of Microsoft MapPoint and Speech Server 2007, and was subsequently tapped for high-level projects integrating these technologies. Connecticut-based StreeTime Technologies was introduced to CQL in this manner.

StreeTime is a designer and manufacturer of next-generation drug and alcohol-screening systems, including 24/7 monitoring devices. The company was interested in developing a Web-based software application that could be used to track parolees and monitor their behavior. The result was the StreeTime Tracker, a tether system that provides parole officers with near real-time control over subjects through a combination of GPS tracking, cellular communications and MapPoint.

The officer can program a "geo-fence" into the system, prohibiting certain locations while establishing time controls for traveling and loitering. In the case of a pedophile, for instance, a violation is recorded whenever the subject moves too close to a school or equivalent location, and an alert is sent to the officer. Eventually, the speech technology will allow the tether to "speak" a message to the subject concerning a violation or other communication. Other monitoring criteria can also be built into the device, including temperature sensors, tampering alerts and biomedical metrics. All of the data is court admissible.

CQL provided all the design and architecture for the system, as it did for another unique initiative, spaceTRAX, a hospital inventory management system built in partnership with Grand Rapids health care furniture maker Innerspace/Datel.

Medical devices represent an ever-growing cost for health care providers, and reimbursements are not keeping pace with the cost of new items — the more recent drug-eluting stents, for instance, cost three to four times that of the standard model in 2004. This type of inventory is a logistical nightmare, as having the right item in stock could be the difference between life and death, while overstock is incredibly costly.

Innerspace/Datel proposed an automated inventory management system to optimize hospital supply chains, and approached CQL as a partner. The technology firm was impressed with the concept and agreed to take on its development as a joint venture.

"Not everyone has the funding to pay for development," said Lardieri. "We like to take chances; that's the entrepreneurial side of the company. ... We have a stake in the product to make it successful."

This is a favorite approach for Lardieri, who bought into CQL 18 months ago as part of an exit strategy for outgoing co-founder Marc Carpenter. The firm has another joint venture in the financial services arena, a risk assessment tool marketed through an investment management firm, as well as an Internet parental control program it solely owns and distributes through an online portal.

"On the service side, we'll always be aggressively promoting it," Lardieri said. "We love the service business, but it's nice to have that crossover. I want to see one of these explode, and I want to be a part of it when it does."

CQL sold its spaceTRAX interest to Innerspace/Datel earlier this year, but continues to lead its development.

CQL is wrapping up its best year in its 13-year history, growing to a \$2.5 million, 18-employee company. It is co-owned by managed services director Kevin Antel, design architect Mike Eldred, and Lardieri, who was an executive at SageStone Consulting before its merger with NuSoft Solutions in 2004. **BJX**

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549 Ottawa Ave. NW Suite 201
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503-1444