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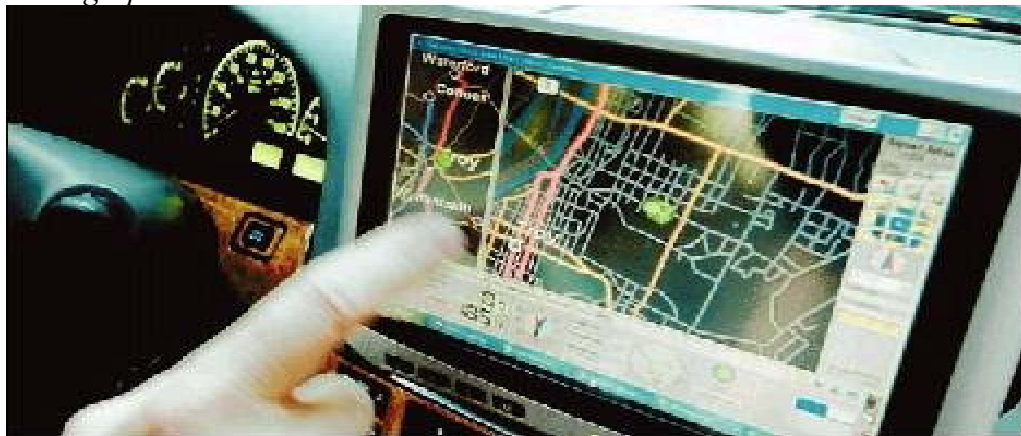
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Dashboard computer to debut in area cars



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Gazette Photographer



Entrepreneur David B. Bonyng shows how the CarXPC screen and keyboard work in his car Friday afternoon in Troy. Below, he uses Global Positioning System software on the touchscreen monitor to show his location.

CarXPC developers have ties to region

By BRIAN McGUIRE
Gazette Reporter

Troy – A little bit of Tech Valley is about to make its way into area automobiles. At least that's the hope of two local entrepreneurs with strong ties to Schenectady County.

David Bonyng, a 1973 graduate of Union College, and Stuart Safft, a resident of Niskayuna, have a product that they think will bring telecommuting – and automobile accessories – to the next level.

The product: a sleek dashboard computer capable of performing all the functions of a desktop unit but designed to complement the interior conditions of a car. Think of it as Knight Rider with Windows XP.

"We're simply trying to take a standard computer and provide those functions comfortably in that setting," Bonynge said. "We're not trying to tell you when your tires are low."

The unit works much like a compact disc changer, with hardware mounted and hidden in the car's trunk. On the other end, an adjustable, seven-inch screen mounts just off the car's dashboard control panel. The monitor is removable.

Bonynge said the computer is aimed at helping people whose jobs keep them in a car – he cited real estate agents or salespeople as examples – by allowing them to bring their work with them on the road. The computer turns on with the car, and remains on for 20 minutes after the car has been turned off.

Of course, it's not expected the driver will be searching the World Wide Web or writing e-mail while driving. Those are activities that would have to wait.

Bonynge said the device also improves on current state of automobile entertainment systems by bringing DVD players, CD players, Global Positioning System devices, and Internet use together in one package for the first time.

"Think of salespeople who have to put away their laptops after every time they use it," he said. "Or stopping suddenly and the laptop goes flying. Our monitor is made for this capability. It's made for heat and cold and bumps. It's made for this use."

Bonynge and Safft say the device is already for sale. They've had several units custom-made in Taiwan and have arranged for a local car installation company, Boomer McLoud, to install them for Capital Region consumers over the next several months so they can monitor use.

They hope to have 100 units installed locally by January, potentially making the Capital Region the nation's first testing ground for the first truly mobile office.

Beyond that, the two men say they are confident their product will quickly gain popularity over the next several years in the same way GPS systems have been installed in cars that didn't come with the option. The two men are now focused on raising money to build inventory.

One potential source of funds is next month's Smart Start Venture Forum at the Marriott Hotel in Colonie, where CarXPC is expected to display the new dashboard computer. In the meantime, Bonynge and Safft have set out to hire a salesperson for the product.

"I've invested a fair amount of time and money saying I think this is a huge, huge market," Bonynge said. "The idea is how do you ride the wave as the tide comes in."

Bonynge has done this kind of thing before. A former software developer at Chase Manhattan Bank and Merrill Lynch in New York City, he formed his first company 10 years ago delivering software solutions to financial services companies. He said that experience and other work on the company acquisition side gave him the mettle to start another venture.

Like many inventions, the dashboard computer was conceived out of frustration. Last fall, Bonynge was on his way to Boston for a work-related meeting and had just bought some GPS software for his laptop. The only problem: he couldn't use it while he drove. "Unless someone else was in the car who was interested," he said, "it was worthless."

Several months later, Bonynge attended a talk for Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute alumni in New Jersey (he holds an MBA from RPI) by Simon Balint, then director of the RPI business incubator. Bonynge approached Balint after the talk and his company, CarXPC, was accepted into the program last spring.

Since then, he has used the space and the contacts to create a business plan and a marketing strategy. Safft, a Harvard Business School graduate with broad consulting experience, came on board earlier this summer.

The dashboard device isn't cheap. Of the three models available on the CarXPC Web site, the least expensive retails for \$2,695. Bonynge and Safft note, however, that they expect many customers write the item off as a business expense on their taxes. They also said price will likely come down as sales volume grows.

They say the benefits of the device range from its wireless keyboard (complete with indentations contoured for the legs) to an elegant interface. Users may connect to the Internet by driving to a wireless hot spot, or through their own cellular phone networks.

Bonynge said he also anticipates the day when drivers will be able to download audio books onto the device from an electronic library and listen to them on the road. But first, he said, the computer has to get into some Capital Region cars.

"It's fairly easy to go out and get components and say I'm going to make something work," Bonynge said. "It's another thing all together to go out and market it and sell it."

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