

Mesa Firm Holds Key to Secure Networks

By Ed Taylor – 05/29/2006

Justin Beck and Chad Swensen are on a mission: To do away with the user name and password. Beck and Swensen, both 34, are co-founders of Sweet Spot Solutions, a Mesa-based company that has designed a device called the S3 key, which plugs into the USB port of a portable laptop computer and authorizes the user's access to a secure network. "The user actually has a user name and password, but it's inside the key, and you never know it," Beck said.

In a major breakthrough for the company, Lockheed Martin has selected the technology to allow its customers, partners and vendors to gain access to the corporation's guest network.

As a major government contractor, Lockheed Martin works with the Department of Defense, NASA and other government agencies whose personnel need access to information in the Lockheed Martin computer network. So the company is controlling that access by providing customers and partners with S3 keys that authenticate the users and give them access to the information wirelessly from their laptop computers, he said.

Each key, containing microprocessor and memory chips, can be customized to provide access to the information within the guest network that the individual needs, he said.

The user also needs to type in a PIN, providing a second level of security.

Lockheed Martin has been testing the system at its Center of Innovation in Virginia for the past year and is ready to roll it out to 10 more company locations, Swensen said.

Sweet Spot also has won several other customers including a Utah bank, several accounting firms, doctors' offices and an air ambulance service.

The Lockheed Martin expansion figures to have a major impact on Sweet Spot. Founded in 2003 in Seattle and moving to Mesa in 2004, the company has only four employees but could expand to 20 by the end of this year. Revenue is expected to reach about \$2 million this year, up from less than \$100,000 in 2005, Beck said. Also the company is looking for new and larger offices.

Under the company's business model, it is outsourcing several important functions, including call center, marketing and development work.

Providing visitors with the security keys will greatly reduce Lockheed Martin's staff workload, said Jason Pfeiffer, chief information security officer. Previously, technicians had to spend hours installing software, downloading drivers and changing computer settings, he said.

Mark Holley, systems manager for the Bank of American Fork, Utah, said the bank adopted the system because it offers two level of security - the key itself and the PIN. The bank has issued S3 keys to employees who need remote access to the bank's network, he said.

"The driving force behind that was our bond insurance company," he said. "They didn't want to insure us unless we had two-factor authentication."

Sweet Spot Solutions

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Mission: Create technology that enhances the security and productivity of computer networks

Products: The S3 product includes a "key" that secures access and data transfers on wired and wireless networks

Target market: Large and midsize companies implementing secure remote access, secure guests and extranet access and/or secure wireless LAN solutions.