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Having revolutionized enforcement processing in the UK, **Allan Freinkel** reveals he now has his sights set on many other markets

Interviewed by Louise Smyth

Although they spell their names differently, Allan Freinkel has a lot in common with another Alan – the famous British entrepreneur Lord Alan Sugar. Both showed a remarkable talent for making money from a young age; Freinkel bought and sold his first property (for a huge profit, naturally) while he was still a teenager. But unlike Sugar, who found his fortune in selling computers, Freinkel decided to focus on what goes into computers – the software.

While living in his home country of South Africa and training to be an accountant, a bar-room conversation one night led Freinkel to spot an opportunity that lured him away from accountancy for good. The talk was about speeding tickets – or more precisely opting not to pay them and being pretty confident you would get away with it, given the rickety enforcement system. You can almost picture the lightbulb above Freinkel's head at this point...

"I'm good at seeing a solution to a problem and banging on doors until someone listens to me," he states. "In this instance, the Pretoria City Council had a major problem in handling the amount of violations they were capturing and really needed an automated process." Freinkel devised this process and StarTraq was born. The contract for the system was signed in December 1999 and by the first quarter of 2000, Pretoria had hugely increased its throughput, from processing hundreds a day to thousands.

By 2002, Freinkel had recognized the same opportunity within the emerging UK speed enforcement market. Thames Valley Police were the first to answer his knock at the door and adopt the software system that allowed them to automate their speed camera enforcement. "They'd been using a mobile camera that produced an asterisk on video frames that had a speeding violation attached," he recalls. "This video would be taken back to the office and an operator would have to watch it and freeze the frame, identify if it was a violation, capture all the information, then move on. So if you were processing three hours of VHS tape, it would take you a minimum of three hours to do one tape; whereas we watched it in

fast-forward and vastly increased their throughput and decreased their manpower requirements. After that it was a snowball effect – many other forces recognized the value in this new solution that freed up the police to concentrate on policing."

StarTraq's latest product is called Dome, the greatest selling point of which is its flexibility. "Firstly, from a business perspective, it's extremely flexible," Freinkel says. "The end-user can buy it from us or one of our partners, they can outsource the processing to us, they can do it themselves or a third-party integrator could buy our technology and do it themselves. Secondly, it's multi-camera and multi-modal. We're not tying anyone down to using one camera type: we interface to more than 20 different camera manufacturers already. And because it processes all different types of violations, one authority that may traditionally have had several back-office solutions can now just have one to cover speed enforcement, parking tickets, bus lane enforcement, and more."

There is also a great deal of built-in flexibility in terms of how the end-user actually wants to deploy the technology. The software is available in multiple languages, which proved valuable on a recent big contract for StarTraq where enforcement notices needed to be sent out in both Welsh and English. But it also means the operators in the back-office can use the software in their native language. "Whether the operator is in Colombia speaking Spanish or in Brazil speaking Portuguese is irrelevant – they can work in their native language," Freinkel observes.

International appeal

The language point is an important one, as he is very keen for Dome to be adopted by new geographic markets. Part of the strategy to make this happen is to license the software to camera vendors so that they can sell the processing as part of their solutions. "Often, the camera vendor's product offering stops at the camera itself," he says. "So we're giving them a system they can build into their existing offering to make a complete solution. And because it's a web-based tool, it's very simple to deploy. All they need if they want the data hosted remotely or on the Cloud securely is an internet browser: the camera would be connected to the internet, it would upload the image and the back-office processing could happen anywhere. The only technology they would need at the client's site is an internet browser and perhaps a local printer to send out the tickets."

The traffic market famously loves a bit of badge engineering, and Freinkel admits that the solution "has been built specifically to allow the vendor, partner or reseller to brand it as their own", a move that ought to be a big selling point for this sector.

As well as selling to international camera vendors, Freinkel is keen to share his solution with the various integrators in the UK market. "If a consultant is taking on the whole outsourcing of an entire police force, there are many complexities involved. We've got great references in this arena – we've been doing it for years and can deliver exactly what we say we will," he says.

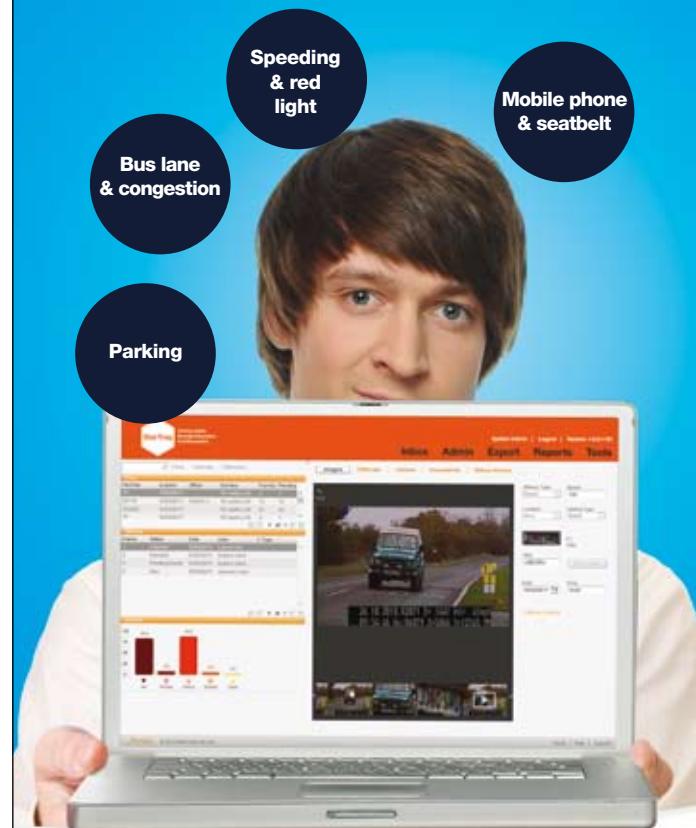
Not deviating from his previous form, 2012 will see Freinkel knocking on a few more doors. "I'll be talking to the big UK integrators to make sure that we are their solution of choice!" ◎



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