



Richard Timm

VEHICLE TRACKING A CHANGING LANDSCAPE



The needs of customers in the vehicle-tracking industry are diverse and always changing, according to Richard Timm, chief technical officer of Matrix Vehicle Tracking. This is why priorities change and the industry has needed to evolve rapidly to meet these new demands.

However, Timm believes that the current key issues in the industry are, in principle, the same as what they have been since vehicle tracking started in South Africa, namely staying ahead of criminals and making sure more vehicles are fitted with units.

The SA vehicle-hijacking industry is a lot older than elsewhere in the world and therefore our tracking industry has evolved much faster and the standards are much higher. Unfortunately, the hijackings in South Africa tend to be more violent than the rest of the world. "The challenge for SA tracking companies then is to keep the driver and passengers as safe as possible," explained Timm.

Timm started his career in the vehicle security industry in 1986, involved in the technical development side and specialising in alarms and immobilisers, and joined the Matrix Vehicle Tracking team in 1997. He has seen first-hand how the industry has developed over the last 20 years. "The most revolutionary advancement in the industry has, without a doubt, been the speed with which processors now operate. We can now take huge amounts of data, process it in record time and get meaningful information from it in a fraction of the time it used to take. In the early days, vehicle owners were excited to know where their vehicle was and that it had been recovered, now they can know the exact location via satellite, be alerted if anyone is tampering with the vehicle or if the vehicle is heading into an unauthorised zone and so much more," Timm said.

He believes technological advancements have resulted in the growth Matrix has experienced over the last few years and will continue to be the leading factor in the company's development in the future.

Timm noted that the focus has shifted to the safety of the customer, but without relenting on the key goal of recovering the vehicle. The industry has taken leaps forward in terms of sophisticated technology. He said, "As technology evolved, so did the type of crimes committed. Car break-ins became hold-ups in parking lots, which turned into hijackings and kidnappings. The industry moved from alarms and immobilisers to tracking units, then to early alert systems and now there are many features designed to ensure drivers are monitored and safe at all times. Matrix Vehicle Tracking has grown to well over 300 employees in the Johannesburg office alone as the industry has called for rapid innovation over a short period of time."

For Timm, it's all for the sake of justice. "It is exceptionally rewarding knowing that I am assisting in seeing people's property returned to them after a traumatic experience. It is also great to be at the forefront of a technological challenge of this nature and to see results. I enjoy seeing the products we are introducing into the market being the first of their kind, ahead of the pack."

Regarding predictions on where the industry is headed, Timm believes 2010 is going to be a year filled with challenges for South Africa. "I think it is going to be great for the country and our industry can provide many solutions for the challenges that lie ahead."

He also predicts that there are big advancements on the horizon. "The moment criminals are caught doing something different, we immediately have to start developing a unit to counteract this."