



i·Teams Hi-tech crime fighters get business boost from i-Teams

A new forensic science technique which could revolutionise the way police forces detect illegal drugs has been given a business boost.

University of East Anglia spin out Intelligent Fingerprinting had developed a ground-breaking new technique which can use the sweat in fingerprints to identify a number of illegal drugs, but needed help in commercialising the innovation.

The business turned to Cambridge University's i-Teams programme for help in finding possible uses for this technique, and recommending which have the greatest commercial potential.

The i-Teams programme was set up in Cambridge in 2006 by Amy Mokady, a local entrepreneur and business angel, and is a collaboration between the Institute for Manufacturing and the Cambridge University Technology and Enterprise Club.

The programme, based on the successful programme created in the US at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, uses multi-disciplinary teams of students to analyse the commercial potential of an emerging, breakthrough technology.

The Norwich-based start-up was borne out of research carried out by the Professor David Russell of the UEA and Dr Sue Jickells of Kings College, London. David and Sue were joined in October 2009 by Dr. Jerry Walker as CEO.

The ground-breaking new technique uses the sweat in fingerprints to identify a number of illegal drugs, prescription drugs and drug metabolites.

Using antibodies and simple imaging techniques allows a range of compounds to be detected quickly and easily. The antibody binds to the substance present in the fingerprint, and allows it to be optically imaged.

The method has already been shown to detect cotinine (a metabolite of nicotine) and three different narcotic drugs.

Applications range from detecting drugs from fingerprints found at crime scenes, to screening machinery operators and prison inmates for drugs. Working with the i-Team, they were able to highlight its potential in institutional drug screening programmes, for example in the military, prisons and hospitals, and in homeland security applications, and gathered positive feedback from a range of industry experts.

The company plans to work closely with some of the world's leading crime scene investigation centres to validate the techniques, before making the solution commercially available.

Such is the potential of the new business that the fledgling firm secured almost a quarter of a million investment from the ICENI seedcorn fund for detection technology for personal identity and illicit substance abuse.

Professor Russell, Chief Science Officer of Intelligent Fingerprinting explained why they had decided to work with i-Teams:

"This was too good an opportunity to miss. We recognised the value of i-Teams immediately and were pleased to have been chosen as the first project from outside

Cambridge. We have been impressed with the high calibre team assembled and plan to stay in touch with them.”

Dr Walker, CEO said the project had produced several benefits: “We were pleased that the i-Team project approached the project from such a broad range of individual perspectives and knowledge. As a consequence, the project output greatly expanded the potential of our technology and benchmarked the size of key markets in illicit drug screening, including high security prisons and broad screening potential across homeland defence, in a way that adds credibility to our plans and exposed the company to Cambridge Angels and other potential investors. ”

Amy Mokady , i-Teams Director was delighted with the outcome of the project: “This was a landmark project in a number of ways as it’s a technology with huge global potential.

“It was also the first time we had ever worked with a technology developed outside of Cambridge University. It was very gratifying to see how the value of working with us had been recognised beyond the confines of Cambridge.”

For more details on i-Teams see www.iteamsonline.org i-Teams is funded from a number of sources, including the Hauser Forum IdeaSpace, the EPSRC, the CIKC and Marks & Clerk.