FEATURE PACKAGE

Environmental Overseers

Sensaphone Helps Enterprises Avoid Disaster By Monitoring Environmental Conditions

by Dan Heilman

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ASTON, PA.,-BASED SENSAPHONE, which designs and manufactures remote monitoring systems for a variety of personal and business applications, has stepped up its place in the IT and data center market to become a primary player in that space. Altogether, the company has more than 300,000 monitoring systems in use throughout the world.

Sensaphone (www.sensaphone.com) got its unique start in 1983 as a division of Gulf+Western, a now-defunct conglomerate that had a hand in industries ranging from movies to defense contracting. Executive Ken Blanchard, who is now the president of Sensaphone, had a boat docked in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay, and one day after a storm, the boat's bilge pump failed and the boat sank. Blanchard asked Gulf+Western engineers to develop a system that could notify him when his boat was in trouble, and the company's Sensaphone division was born.

"Ken figured there must be a way to notify people when there's a problem, and in the early '80s there really wasn't," says Bob Douglass, Sensaphone's vice president of sales and marketing. When Gulf+Western divested itself of a number of its divisions in 1985, Blanchard bought the division and established it as an independent business. Sensaphone's initial applications were in the residential market, but the company quickly grew from catering to people who wanted to know when the pipes were frozen in their vacation homes to meeting the needs of industrial and commercial environments.

"Ken was smart enough to realize that the potential was far beyond people with vacation homes," says Douglass, who has been

The product has a built-in Web interface and functions as a Web server. It can also be configured to send emails or texts when a problem is detected.

The next step up is Sensaphone's IMS-1000 (Infrastructure Monitoring System), a 19-inch rack-based system. The communication in this system travels by both Ethernet and phone line. "Most of the other products on the market are Ethernet-only, but if your network goes down, you can't communicate," Douglass says. "Whenever your network is down, you'll probably still have phone service—phones are still more reliable than Internet in many cases. This gives you that redundant backup."

The IMS-1000 will make a voice phone call using a voice integration system and use voice to actually describe the issue—for instance, "server rack 12, row 2, temperature is running at 97 degrees." Also, if users suspect a problem, they can phone

they're network-based," Douglass says. "We have enterprise customers where the products are all in different cities, but there's one master management system. If communication drops off between modules, it automatically generates a diagnostic report."

The Future Is Wireless

Sensaphone is about to release wireless sensors for the IMS-4000. Within the year, it also plans an as-yet-unnamed entry-level product that will enable wireless monitoring of data centers.

The focus in the data center of 2011 is not just on reliability but also on efficiency in cooling, power, and other crucial operating areas. That's where wireless monitoring comes in, Douglass says. "When [customers] set up a new data center, they want to do temporary testing—what's airflow like in this specific location?" he says.

SENSAPHONE®
REMOTE MONITORING SOLUTIONS

PROCESSOR COMPANY TO WATCH

Company Name: Sensaphone
Location: Aston, Pa.
URL: www.sensaphone.com
Date Company Founded: 1983
Interesting Fact: Sensaphone started as a division of super-conglomerate Gulf+Western.

> "You need the redundancy and standalone operation you get from wake-up circuits, watchdog circuits, and surge protection. When that really big disaster happens, the product is still going, and it will communicate one way or the other."
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> *- Sensaphone's Bob Douglass*

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with Sensaphone since 1985 and originally worked in development and engineering for the company. "That monitoring ability applies to greenhouses, oil and natural gas, water treatment stations—all kinds of things. It was his vision to shift the focus of the product line to more commercial and industrial applications."

Solutions For All Settings

Sensaphone, which produces all of its products onsite without the help of subcontractors, offers three main tiers of products for the data center—a market segment that Douglass says "has been one of our strongest and fastest-growing areas for monitoring and alarm notifications."

The entry-level Web600 is an Ethernet-based product that can monitor up to six conditions: temperature, humidity, power failure, water on the floor, smoke, or fire.

into the system and have it describe the current conditions.

The plug-and-play system, which comes with built-in battery backup, uses sensors with CAT 5 cable (meaning no more cutting and stripping wires) and can monitor up to eight devices.

Sensaphone's top of the line for data centers is the IMS-4000 system, which does everything the IMS-1000 system does but is a more expandable, robust enterprise-level product. Boasting an internal battery backup, the unit lets users do network diagnostics—or traceroutes and pinging of other locations—with a touch-tone phone from any location, and it will come back with a voice that says whether a sensor is responding.

"It has a master/slave setup where the host unit can be in your main location and the expansion nodes can be anywhere, since

"They want to be able to put wireless sensors everywhere, adjust what needs adjusting, [and] then take the sensors out and move them elsewhere."

Douglass adds that because Sensaphone is in so many markets—including military and disease control—it's had to learn a lot about reliability over the years.

"The world is becoming more dependent on uptime," he says. "There are so many more Web-based services, and 99.999% reliability isn't good enough. So it's all about early warning and early notification—better communication and reliability all around."

He adds, "You need the redundancy and standalone operation you get from wake-up circuits, watchdog circuits, and surge protection. When that really big disaster happens, the product is still going, and it will communicate one way or the other." Ⓟ