



## AN EXTRA PAIR OF HANDS : Local firm makes delicate surgery easier for doctors

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TrueVision founder Michael Weissman demonstrates the use of the TrueVision System's high-powered camera, which projects an image onto a screen so those in the operating room can see what a surgeon is doing. Special glasses must be worn to view the screen.

MICHAEL MORIATIS / NEWS-PRESS



A Santa Barbara medical technology company has the world of microsurgery in its sights. Executives at TrueVision Systems, a company founded in October 2006, said they see several market niches to sell the 3D, high-definition camera: hospitals and medical schools, the military and private practice surgeons. The firm's top managers -- local technology veterans with expertise in growing startups -- expect the product will be strong in the areas of neurology and ophthalmology.

"This [product] upgrades the world of surgical visualization," said CEO Forrest Fleming. "It is an enhancement, not a replacement," for high-powered microscopes used in brain and eye surgeries, he emphasized. The three-component system, which sells for \$80,000, dovetails nicely with several brand-name surgical microscopes, he added.

Cornell University, St. Louis University, Columbia University, Washington University, Eye Institute of West Florida and the Santa Barbara Surgery Center have adopted the machines. Currently, the equipment is at eight sites around the country.

A U.S. Defense Department contractor "sees a good synergy" for the product for telemedicine departments at Army hospitals stateside and in Iraq. This business segment "is one of the more promising prospects" for 2008, according to Mr. Fleming, who once ran ScentAir Technologies.

"We're seeing a lot of excitement on the surgeon's part," said Robert Reali, VP of sales and marketing, who, with Mr. Fleming, has demonstrated the software-driven product around the country in a number of operating rooms. "What they (the doctors and their staffs) like is that it frees them from the bondage of old school microscopic visualization," said Mr. Reali, a veteran of ExperTelligence.



Santa Barbara-based TrueVision's corporate officers, who will be looking to raise an additional \$3 million to \$5 million in capital, are, from left: Forrest Fleming, CEO; Robert Reali, VP of sales and marketing; Michael Weissman, founder; and Burton Tripathi, VP of product development.

The system also allows medical personnel to save, store, retrieve and transmit images via the Internet; hence its interest from telemedicine practitioners.

One local doctor, Douglas Katsev, said he was surprised at how easily he adapted to the TrueVision system after 18 years of surgical practice, mostly cataract and laser procedures.

Although a majority of surgeons are used to looking through an operating microscope, Dr. Katsev said the system allows doctors to sit in a comfortable position and move without having to have their eyes fixed on an eye piece. The view is the same as seeing through an operating microscope, Dr. Katsev said. "The images are much larger and projected onto a screen, and you have depth perception when using it. You can literally see around the corner," he said, adding that the system also integrates well with pre-surgical imaging tools such as MRI and CT scans.

Another benefit: the device gives operating room personnel an opportunity to view exactly what the surgeon sees while working on the patient, Dr. Katsev said. He has worked with the company during the development stages, helping engineers and programmers tweak the system before bringing it to clinical use.

In the early stages, the company raised \$1.5 million within a month of its founding, mostly from local angels, Mr. Fleming said. "We're taking money into the company real slowly," he said. TrueVision sales and marketing staff will be building product awareness at medical-oriented trade shows and is looking at utilizing doctors as key opinion leaders to help spread the word via industry trade articles.

Mr. Fleming said the company needs a track record of success in order to attract additional investment. He estimated the next investment round would be in the \$3- to \$5-million range.

While the direct sales route will be strong, another way of getting the product into the hands of the doctors will be strategic partnership with a distributor of hospital microscopes.

Now operating from cramped quarters at 114 E. Haley St., TrueVision staff will relocate to a larger administrative-manufacturing space in Goleta later this year. Currently, the company has 12 employees, including virtual consultants.

"This is a niche market, so we aren't going to be producing a huge volume of systems," Mr. Fleming said, predicting that the company will produce and sell a couple hundred of units a month within five years. "This technology is still in its infancy. We're creating a market where one currently doesn't exist."