

Microsurgery niche brings sales gains for local medical device company

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A growing Santa Barbara company is striking a nerve in the world of healthcare with a nice recent pickup in sales of its medical device.

TrueVision recently announced that four major hospital neurosurgical departments purchased its 3D visualization platform for microsurgery, which sells in the \$150,000 range. The hospitals include the UC San Francisco; Stanford University Medical Center; University of Michigan Health System; and the Arkansas Neuroscience Institute at St. Vincent Health System.

"TrueVision continues to build on its core 3D visualization platform with software applications providing improved patient outcomes in specific surgical procedures," said Forrest Fleming, the company's CEO. "Our first application area was focused on improving aspects of cataract surgery, the most performed surgery in the world. In the longer term, we expect TrueVision to be an integral part of most of surgical disciplines (such as neurology)," he added.

Robert Reali, vice president of operations and marketing for TrueVision, said the recent sales mean the company's product has now been installed at 50 institutions around the world, which is good news for the investment partners who helped launch the firm three years ago.

TrueVision's pitch to doctors, according to Mr. Reali, is that the software-based program frees them from the limits of old school microscopic visualization.



TrueVision is aiming for an international clientele; company officials hosted a delegation from a medical device company in China this past spring. On hand for the reception were Santa Barbara Mayor Helene Schneider, second from right, and UCSB Chancellor Henry Yang, far right.
MATT WIER/NEWS-PRESS



A surgeon conducts a procedure with the help of a TrueVision 3D device.

The system allows doctors to sit in a comfortable position and move without having their eyes fixed on an eye piece. The images are much larger and are projected onto a flat panel display. Another benefit: the device gives operating room personnel an opportunity to view exactly what a surgeon sees while working on a patient.

According to Dr. Michael Lawton, a UCSF neurosurgeon and professor, "The 3D capability enhances our ability to teach difficult surgical techniques to residents and the OR staff love it."

His comments were echoed by another surgeon-educator, Oren Sagher, residency program director for neurosurgery at the University Hospital in Michigan. "The time we have to teach residents is not enough, and we need tools like TrueVision to make better use of the time we have," said Dr. Sagher.

"These surgeons are arguably in the top 25 in the US," said Mr. Reali. "Getting these institutions on board validates everything we've been doing."

The major obstacle for smaller hospitals is the cost. But many are able to fund the purchase through philanthropic grants and from patient donations.

While new sales contracts in the U.S. are imminent (revenue tripled for TrueVision during the last year), especially at teaching hospitals and specialty surgery centers, the company also sees opportunity in the red-hot medical device market in China.

Indeed, TrueVision recently hosted a delegation from China. Executives at WEGO, one of the Asian country's largest medical device companies, want to sell TrueVision's product in the world's most populous nation, which is undergoing a major hospital building program. The Santa Barbara company is moving forward on finalizing the details on the joint venture with WEGO in the next 30-60 days, said Mr. Reali.

TrueVision is big on research and development, according to Mr. Reali, investing a good portion of revenue in ongoing software upgrades.

Growth has also brought about hiring, most notably for TrueVision's contract manufacturing partner, which is located in Huntsville, Ala.

"Yes, it is a product made in the USA," Mr. Reali said proudly.

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