

Stuck on You

A new high-tech spitball could prove handy for more than just police work.

BY JOSHUA HYATT

IT IS SAFE TO SAY that Hugh Brydges was in a fragile emotional state when he came up with the concept for StarChase. Not only was he recovering from cancer, but his partner in a boating-accessories startup had just been killed. A mother of three, she was an innocent victim in a 22-mile, high-speed police chase. That got Bridges to thinking: Why couldn't the cops use a tracking device to tail fugitives?

StarChase fires sticky projectiles at other cars from air-powered launchers mounted on police cruisers. The racquetball-sized missiles are actually GPS modules equipped with wireless modems. Once a vehicle is tagged, a dispatcher can track its whereabouts on any computer with Net access. "We're hoping that because of StarChase, people's lives won't be at risk if an idiot decides to steal a car or take off after being stopped for a traffic violation," says Brydges.

StarChase should be available to police departments late next year. But why stop at law enforcement? It could be the hottest new management tool since the pie chart. Think of that guy on your payroll who claims to work from home. Take him out for an afternoon game of laser tag—pretend it's for team-building purposes. Then return to headquarters and start monitoring his every footfall. Within minutes, you'll be tracking that telecommuter from his home office to his rumpus room, where he coincidentally straggles every afternoon just in time for a classic Bassmaster rerun on ESPN12.

"Nobody is going to be shooting anybody with this,"

warns Trevor Fischbach, 38, vice president of business development and sales at four-year-old StarChase. (Fischbach actually patented a tag-and-pursuit system in 2001 but didn't have the means to start a company.) For his part, Brydges isn't quite so stuck on restricting his invention to police. "Just think if we had hit Osama Bin Laden's camel with it," he muses.

It's not just Osama: A lot of people need hounding. Imagine if the next time your sales rep calls to say that he's meeting a client for lunch on the south side of town, you could see him heading north toward the dog track. Or what about the office manager who skips work one day, ostensibly to stay home with her sick child? At the next staff meeting you can wow your entire workforce by wondering out loud whether spending two hours and 37 minutes at the Container Store was really an effective way to boost the brat's antibodies.

I'll bet you have a few deadbeat companies on your client list. Want 'em to pay up? Plug the CEO with one of these high-tech



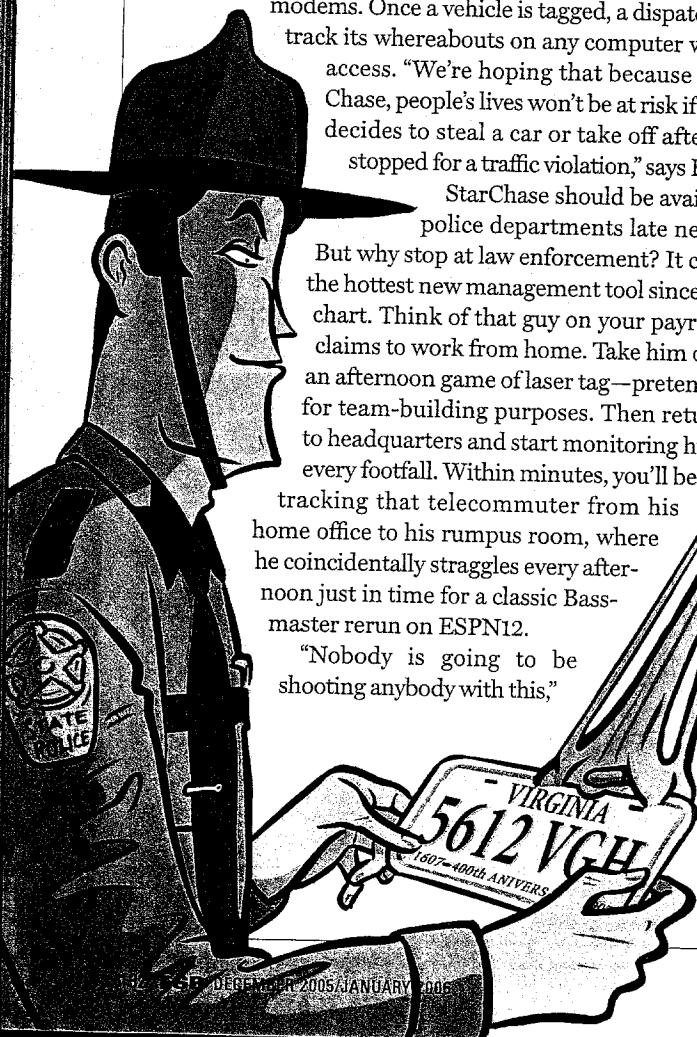
spitballs, then track him to his neighborhood ATM. When the bigshot exits, you can be waiting outside, aggressively curious about the missing dough. Or what

about civilians who need to conduct their own high-speed chases? Surely I'm not the only guy who's ever forced a FedEx truck off the road for an unscheduled pickup. And why not shoot each taxi as it pulls away, the better to track down that cell-phone you always leave behind?

StarChase applications abound in the exciting field of inventory management. Tag your office supplies to find out who keeps filching those Wall Walkers you buy to relieve executive stress. The glycerin soap sampler that you generously hand out to workers every holiday season? Shoot it first, if you want to learn the true meaning of regifting. (This method is also effective for wedding gifts, as if you needed confirmation that your crockpot escapes from the dank basement only when you visit.) And why not tag your spouse's car just to make sure that he isn't stopping at a speed-dating convention on the way to the supermarket?

Brydges, 50, knows about being cast aside. He no longer has any operational role in the Virginia Beach firm. "I'm nothing at the company," he says. "They don't want the visionary anymore." (COO Mandy McCall says StarChase's relationship with Brydges is "not contentious," then refers other questions to a lawyer.) Brydges owns around 15% of StarChase, having used the rest to lure talent and financing. "I gave them all they needed," he says.

He's pretty sure about this much: If StarChase's managers want him back, they know how to find him. □



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Hidden Risks

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is safer than starting a
business? **THINK AGAIN.**

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Roger McCabe, 61,
owner of five Meineke
shops in the Midwest,
is doing well but found
franchising tougher
than he expected.

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