

hardware

SYSTEMS AND PERIPHERALS

NEW OPPORTUNITIES EMERGE IN THE EMERGENCY MOBILITY MARKET

By Jennifer Lawinski

As technology answers the demand to become increasingly more mobile, solution providers are given the opportunity to leverage partnerships to create solutions that can help workers on-the-move and generate new sources of revenue by expanding into emerging markets.

First Mobile Technologies, a Cincinnati-based solution provider that manufactures mounting hardware, cradles, trays and docking stations for in-vehicle systems, has partnered with Beaverton, Ore.-based display maker Planar Systems, to create vehicle-mounted custom systems targeted at public safety vehicles such as police cars, fire trucks and ambulances.

For Planar, the foray into the public safety market has opened up a plethora of new business opportunities.

"We have a 20-something-year history of dealing with displays. We haven't done a lot in the public

safety space. Then, First Mobile and Dell invited us to the table, and we helped them create a three-piece solution for in-vehicle applications," said Hal Newton, strategic marketing manager for Planar's industrial business unit.

According to Newton, the display is constructed to withstand the demands of public safety users on the job, whether tracking down criminals, battling fires or saving lives.

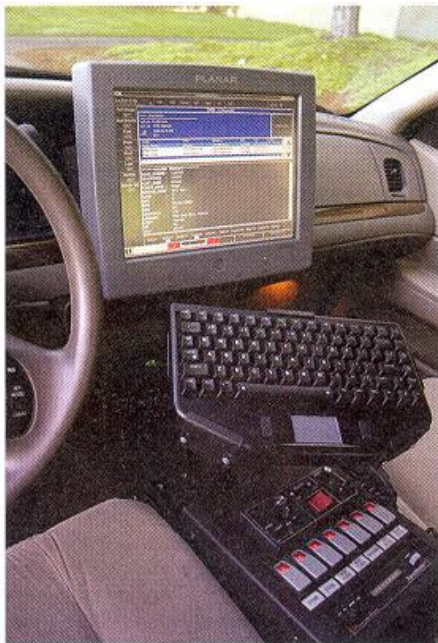
"You have to have a durable screen. That display is going to get a lot of abuse in these vehicles," he said.

Last month, Planar launched its latest ruggedized display—the LX1200TR LCD monitor—the company's first product tailored to the requirements of public safety vehicles and a move which perfectly meets the needs of First Mobile.

The 12-inch monitor features a rugged magnesium casing, a touch screen that works even when the user is wearing gloves, and a two-port



emergency vehicle, that allows the computer to be



Planar's LX1200TR LCD (top r.) is designed to meet the needs of public safety vehicles and works well with First Mobile's system.

USB hub that enables the use of USB flash memory drives to transfer information among computers and vehicles.

First Mobile has put together an offering combining Planar's touch-screen LX1200TR LCD monitor, Dell laptops and its own mounting hardware, Newton said.

"We started out essentially working with [Planar] on the touch screen because we liked the design of their products," said Bobbie Baker, director of business strategy at First Mobile, which also partners with Panasonic and Itronix. "We are a premier partner of some of the larger computer manufacturers. Planar has had a good reputation with these manufacturers, and that's essentially how we met and decided to become partners," Baker said.

As a result of its reputation for excellence and design, First Mobile turned to Planar to develop displays for its in-vehicle systems.

"Any time you're working inside a car, any real estate you have in a car is invaluable. The less you have up front blocking the driver or the passenger, the better off you are. A rugged touch screen can actually be mounted in the dash area, out of the way of any type of emergency action that has to take place in the vehicle. There's a safety factor as well," Baker said.

"With [Planar's] touch screen up front in an

mounted in the back of the vehicle," Baker added.

Partnerships like the one Planar has established with First Mobile allow display manufacturers to reach markets it might not be able to target on its own.

"We're comfortable in focusing on our display technology and helping facilitate resellers of different varieties packaging our products as part of an overall solution," Newton said. "The reseller has knowledge of the market, and they may be providing us PC and other products from other people, but they're including our display as part of their total solutions," he said.

For First Mobile and Planar, the plan is to bring the in-vehicle devices to other vertical markets. First Mobile also resells its mounting hardware and products, which it says have been tested to meet military standards for durability and stability, to other solution providers, further expanding the potential reach of its partners.

"[We will be] expanding into new markets where mobile technology is just starting to take off. It has had long application in the public safety and utility markets. It's ever-growing as we become more technology-dependent. We have everybody from insurance agencies to meter readers who need computers in their cars," Baker said. "We're also looking to grow by partnering with companies like Planar that have a solid reputation."