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Business Journal

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OCTOBER 19-25, 2007

School security needs propel Prepared Response

BY GREG LAMM
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When Jim Finnell joined Prepared Response Inc. in 2002, the company formed by Pierce County law enforcement officials in the wake of the Columbine High School shootings had no major contracts and only four employees.

But the two-year-old startup had recently landed \$1.25 million in seed fund-

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Jim Finnell, CEO
Prepared Response Inc.

ing from Seattle-based Benaroya Capital. And Finnell saw the potential in the Tacoma-based company’s mapping technology designed to help school officials, law enforcement and other emergency responders better communicate in the chaotic horror that follows mass shootings, such as the April 20, 1999, incident at the Colorado school, which left 15 dead, including the two shooters.

“I just thought that it was a tremendous idea,” said Finnell, Prepared Response’s CEO, whose background includes leadership roles in technology and emergency services companies. “I thought it was a business model that we could capitalize on.”

He was right. Today, Tacoma-based Prepared Response has nearly 50 workers. And in another year, Finnell said the work force is likely to top 60. Revenue in 2006 was about \$4.9 million, a hefty jump from the company’s 2004 revenue of \$2.05 million.

The company does business with the departments of Justice and Homeland Security. And Finnell recently attended the National Homeland Defense Foundation’s national first responders conference in Colorado Springs, Colo., in hopes of expanding Prepared Response’s client base.

But 80 percent of the company’s business is with educational facilities, including colleges and K-12 schools in Washington and several other states that are using the company’s signature product, Rapid Responder.

The product maps school buildings, including 300 data points such as site plans,



Finnell

floor plans and locations of hazardous materials.

“Everything you would want to know about the facility we try to get to their fingertips in a timely fashion,” said Finnell.

Soon after Rapid Responder was installed at Lewis and Clark High School in Spokane in September 2006, a teenager pulled out a 9 mm pistol in science class and started shooting. First responders on the scene had immediate computer access to maps and phone numbers, allowing officials to quickly evacuate the school and corner the student. He was wounded, but survived, and was the only casualty.

Rapid Response is not a shield that can completely keep students from harm, said Tom Corzine, deputy director of the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs. But it can provide invaluable, accurate, immediate information to first responders, he said.

In 2005, Prepared Response landed a \$6.9 million contract with the association to deploy the Rapid Responder product in the state’s 2,200 K-12 public schools.

That followed a contract for \$3.3 million in 2003 to digitally map all the state’s high schools.

On Sept. 11 of this year, thanks in part to the Prepared Response product, the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs won this year’s Noblis Innovation Awards in Homeland Security, given out by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

“PRI has been a good partner,” Corzine said. “They have delivered.”



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Seattle

Safety and crisis management systems

Fiscal year	Total operating revenue	No. of employees
2004	\$2.05M	21
2005	\$3.26M	35
2006	\$4.86M	43

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