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Security businesses thrive

By **JESSICA WEHRMAN**
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Even as the dust from the fallen World Trade Center settled in New York City, the first businesses emerged centered around a new, ubiquitous term: homeland security.

Some were opportunists, looking for a quick buck. Others were people who finally found a market for expertise they had honed for years. These businesses had a legitimate purpose and a suddenly pressing mission.

Two years later, many of the opportunists are gone, the only trace of their existence left in deleted e-mails. Others, however, continue to thrive even though the economy has crumbled and the 2001 attack is an increasingly distant memory.

Smart cards, bomb-sniffing dogs, escape hoods and better-trained security are the most tangible signs of those businesses. Still emerging are revolutionary products, such as a paint additive that would keep painted walls from retaining nerve agents.

"Most of the technology we see coming into the world is technology that's been in development," said Roy Bordes, president and CEO of the Bordes Group, which consults with businesses on security. "Now, because of Sept. 11, it's been taken into the point of fruition because of a demand for it."

Reactive Surfaces LTD, the company that created a paint additive to detoxify nerve agents such as sarin and VX, plans to have the product on the market by year's end. It is currently in the regulatory period, moving forward on technical development, marketing and manufacturing said DeAndra Beck, the company's CEO. The company hopes to sell the product abroad as well as in the United States. "We know the threats aren't going away," Beck said.

In the two years since 9/11, customers have become more savvy, said Mike Guevremont, who, with fellow former White House employee Mark Miller, created Executive Protection Systems. The company offers training in industrial safety and sells products including masks to protect against biological or chemical attacks.

"People know what's going on," he said. "And in turn, they will not buy junk off the Internet."

Guevremont said customers initially were most interested in products. Now, many are looking for training.

But even as companies such as Executive Protection Systems grow, others find their birth stunted by a slow economy. Security supplies are not always the highest priority, particularly in areas not directly affected by the Sept. 11 attacks.

According to a study by the American Society for Industrial Security's Conference Board released last month, corporate median security spending rose about 9 percent in Boston, New York and other Northeast cities since Sept. 11, 2001. Elsewhere, it rose less than 3 percent.

"Business leaders are reluctant to spend more on security when they don't see it contributing directly to their bottom lines," said Tom Cavanaugh, author of the report.

Bordes, too, has seen a slide, though, in corporate managers' vigilance. Companies continue to be focused on profits, he said, "and security bites into that big time."

The rush for duct tape is long gone, as is the feeling of "impending doom," Guevremont said.

Alan Capps of the ANSER Institute of Homeland Security, a homeland security research organization, warns that the pendulum can always swing back _ one new threat, he said, and Home Depot will be desperately trying to keep plastic sheeting in stock. In the interim, consumers are taking a more measured approach toward security spending. Ideally, he said, Americans will keep a good flashlight and a battery-powered radio, but will not panic at the first sign of a threat.

Bordes worries that U.S. complacency will leave many Americans unprepared despite the new technology.

"We are a country of convenience," Bordes said. "If nothing happens, it's very easy for us to say 'nothing happened, so we'll just wait on this.' "

On the Net: www.reactivesurfaces.com

www.executiveprotectionsystems.com