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Local Startup Can Take a Victory Lap for Its PlanetCar App



HEALTH CARE

Brittany Meiling

BitCot Inc., a small startup in San Diego, has won an innovation contest hosted by Santa Cruz electronics giant **Plantronics** by connecting first responders with car accident victims.

The nine-month “hack-a-thon” hosted by Plantronics’ innovation arm, **PLT Labs**, attracted 88 teams from 33 countries in a competition to make the best companion app for Plantronics’ new Bluetooth headset, the Concept One. The new hands-free device is venturing into wearable territory, loaded with sensors that use an accelerometer, a gyroscope and a compass to collect data about the user.

The headset is equipped with some typical wearable features such as a pedometer to count steps, but also sports sensors that can detect head orientation in three dimensions and the ability to detect a “free fall” action.

PlanetCar

Raj Sanghvi, founder and CEO of BitCot, took home the \$50,000 grand prize for his mobile app, PlanetCar. The app uses the built-in sensors to raise an alert in the event of a car accident or collision. The goal is to help first responders reach the site of an emergency faster, Sanghvi said.

PlanetCar uses data gleaned from the headset to detect violent head movement or a vehicle free fall. The app allows 60 seconds for the user to cancel

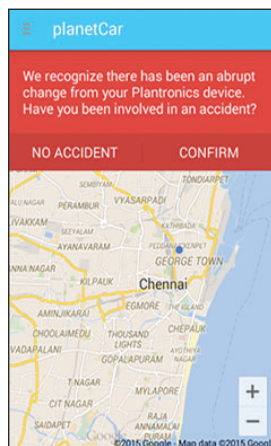


Raj Sanghvi

false alarms. If the alert is not canceled, it will send an SOS notification to emergency contacts and first responders.

“If you’ve just been in an accident, you may not be able to reach your phone,” Sanghvi said. “It’s like having 911 dialed for you.”

The app can also use the headset’s “tap technology” to alert the PlanetCar app of a nonviolent emergency, such as a heart attack.



“You can press your finger on your Plantronics headphones three times, and it sends a direct SOS alert out to first responders,” Sanghvi said.

The Curve Whisperer

BitCot,

founded in 2014, already has developed a location-tagging technology that would allow drivers to tag certain areas, such as turns or bridges, as hazardous. The idea is to accumulate data from many users into a cloud that could then notify users of upcoming hazards as they drive.

“In the future, this technology could even whisper in your ear to have caution when approaching a turn,” Sanghvi said.

It’s easy to imagine Siri or Google Maps warning drivers of potential dangers as they navigate drivers with GPS, but Sanghvi said the data could also have applications in infrastructure.

“Governments could use this data to identify locations that need work,” Sanghvi said.

The company built a prototype using the Plantronics Concept One that works on both Apple and Android platforms.

Sanghvi said the company, which employs 30 people who work remotely, may consider a partnership with Plantronics if one is formally offered.

All of the contestants for the innovation contest went through a rigorous series of elimination rounds, culminating with a formal presentation in front of a select panel of Plantronics judges. Each team’s submission was judged on technical compatibility with Plantronics devices, real-world feasibility, and overall creativity.

“We were extraordinarily pleased with our ability to engage innovators all around the world,” said **Christopher Thompson**, vice president of global product marketing at Plantronics in a statement. “Through this context we were able to demonstrate that wearable, intelligent communications technology has appeal that goes well beyond traditional communications and collaboration applications.”

Donate Red

Sanghvi said BitCot is primarily a tech company that earns revenue by building custom apps for clients, but the company seems to have an eye on health.

Other than SmartCar, BitCot has developed a blood donation platform called Donate Red.

The mobile and Web app can be used by any donation organization to connect those in need of blood to those who are able to donate it.

“We are looking for organizations that are willing to take this platform and use this for a cause,” Sanghvi said.

The company will reinvest the prize money in developing new innovative apps, Sanghvi said.