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## TECH TALK

### Snagg Snags Crooks With Miniature ID Devices

**Technology:** Radio Markers Show True Ownership of Stolen Musical Instruments

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ESCONDIDO — Snagg is taking anti-theft technology on the road.

Working with police in Columbus, Ohio, the tiny California company plans to put radio frequency identification tags on construction equipment and tools in that Midwest city — then see if such hidden markers can identify stolen property.

It's a departure for Snagg, whose primary

product is a system to identify musical instruments using microchips and an Internet database.

The 3-year-old company, which has six full-time employees, distributes radio frequency chips similar to the ones put under the skin of pets. The rice-grain-sized chips are embedded in musical instruments.

When a person waves a scanner over the instrument, the chip communicates its serial number, which appears on the scanner's display.

The number is then checked against an Internet database maintained by Snagg. Assuming the database entry has been kept current, the registry will show the instrument's rightful owner.

Snagg charges \$20 to register an instrument.

Company President Don Baskin estimates he and his partners have put more than \$200,000 into Snagg since its founding.

Their system is unlike that put out by Massachusetts-based LoJack Corp., whose transceivers can lead police to stolen automobiles in chop shops.

With Snagg, the people already have an object in front of them. The question they have is who really owns it.

Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Fender Musical Instruments Corp. puts Snagg radio frequency ID tags in guitars coming out of its custom shop. A network of music stores also installs the tags.

The tiny tag might go under a fret marker or between the neck and body of a guitar, said

Thom Beebe, general manager of **Guitar Trader** on Kearny Mesa, which deals in the devices. In some cases, removing the tag means damaging the instrument.

Beebe sees the need for the tags and the associated Internet registry. With secondhand instruments coming in and out of his store, Beebe must keep an eye out for stolen items. All secondhand items are held for 30 days to allow police to check stolen property records.

Often reports of stolen items don't leave the county, say Snagg promotional materials.

Right now 60 musical instrument dealers like Guitar Trader have microchip scanners. Baskin said his company plans to distribute chip readers to police once there are enough Snagg-equipped instruments in circulation.

The Ohio trial has come as a result of an invitation.

Lt. Michael Broberg of the Columbus Police Department said he heard Snagg's Baskin speak about his business at a conference. Broberg said he later told Baskin it would be great if he could apply the technology to construction equipment.

Serial numbers on things such as front-end loaders are often obliterated, Broberg said.

The Columbus test will involve putting hidden chips in the vehicles, tools, laptop computers and other assets of several construction companies, plus one of the area's 16 colleges. The organizations agreed to be "guinea pigs" for the test, said Broberg.

The radio frequency technology used in Columbus will be slightly different than that used for the musical instruments, Baskin said. The tests begin this summer.