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'Black box' idea travels to cars

By Harold Davis
Special Correspondent

Posted: 05/21/2009 10:32:35 PM EDT

Updated: 05/22/2009 08:27:31 AM EDT



Stamford resident Mark Nowotarski says his patent-pending SoberTeen Driving Insurance product will let parents monitor their teenager's driving and may help them save on car insurance. (Dru Nadler/Staff Photographer)

Does your newly licensed teenager drive too fast? Do you worry when he or she takes your car to hang with friends you haven't met? Are you spending a small fortune to insure your novice driver?

You're not alone, and Mark Nowotarski sees a business opportunity in that.

The Stamford resident says his patent-pending SoberTeen Driving Insurance product will let parents monitor their teenager's driving and may help them save 10 percent to 30 percent on the

insurance.

"When you look at the accident rates for young drivers (compared) to mature drivers, it's high and parents are bearing with high rates for car insurance," Nowotarski said.

Nowotarski, president of Markets, Patents & Alliances LLC in Stamford, began his intellectual property consulting firm eight years ago and is a registered U.S. patent agent. He has 17 other patents to his credit.

Nowotarski said he came up with the idea for SoberTeen last fall and hopes to sell the patent license to an insurance company that would collaborate with a manufacturer for a black box, similar to technology that is used in airplanes, to keep an electronic eye on the driver.

The device will record braking force, speed and proximity to other cars. It also can identify risky behaviors such as drunken driving, and talking or texting on a cell phone while behind the wheel, Nowotarski said. Teens and their parents get "Safe Driver" reports based on the information the box would record.

After his patent was published in February, Nowotarski volunteered the idea to open review on PeerToPatent.com, a forum where anyone, including inventors and common folk, can discuss patent applications. He said the response has been favorable. Nowotarski also is using social networking media to promote SoberTeen.

"What I've been trying to do is leverage social networking sites like LinkedIn and Twitter. By starting discussion on this, I've be getting some very helpful feedback," said Nowotarski, who was a resaerch engineer with Praxair Inc. in Danbury for 20 years.

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Bryan Mattimore, co-president of Growth Engine Co. in Norwalk, referred to SoberTeen as a product in the telematics area -- collecting and transmitting information -- which is hot right now.

"The basic idea is that you now have access to driving information that you never had before. This should revolutionize the way that insurance is sold, bought and how it's priced," Mattimore said.

Mattimore said he believes this type of product has a lot of potential and that the more progressive insurance companies will be attracted to it.

"This will tell you that you brake more than 40 percent of the time or that you're not braking enough. It gives you feedback to learn how to be better a driver. This is a tremendous plus for us in terms of roadside safety," he said.

"It's all about getting better rates and insurance guys want to insure people that are good drivers," Mattimore said.

-- For more on Nowotarski, visit www.marketsandpatents.com.

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