

## HARDWARE

# Vision system sticks it to trash scofflaws

BY RODNEY H. BROWN

MASS HIGH TECH STAFF

In the town of Plymouth, the trash transfer stations are cleaning up with technology born of the machine vision systems usually found in the clean rooms of chip makers.

Startup **Secure-A-Lot** was spun out of Bedford-based **Vision Machines Inc.**, a decade-old company that makes and installs machine vision systems for clients such as **The Gillette Co.**, **Cabot Corp.** and the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing, among others. Founder and president **Marc Landman** had been integrating optics, electronics and custom-coded software to inspect everything from semiconductors to newly minted

change, when the opportunity to take his expertise in a completely new direction came his way.

Plymouth resident **Bruce Schulman**, who is Landman's partner in **Secure-A-Lot**, had heard that his town had

tested a way to use cameras to eliminate the need for people to buy and place transfer station stickers on their cars, thereby eliminating the need to hire attendants to check for such stickers.

Designed by a California company, the system that **Arthur Douylliez**, facilities manager for the Department of Public Works in Plymouth, had tested wasn't working the way he wanted, Douylliez said, so he sought out a better solution. He contacted **Schulman**, who found **Landman**, and the two decided to see what could be done to improve on the system.

"We came up with an inspection system that was less expensive than what they have at, say, an airport," **Schulman** said.

**Landman** designed a system that uses a camera to record every license plate that enters any of the three transfer stations in Plymouth. The plate numbers get cross-referenced against a database of people who have paid their transfer station dumping fee — and who would previously have been given a sticker — and if the plate isn't on the list, Plymouth sends out a fine for using their facilities without permission.

"It was costing me over \$20,000 a

## VISION MACHINES INC.

www.vision-machines.com

**Business:** Machine vision inspection systems integrator

**Location:** Bedford

**President:** Marc Landman

**Founded:** 1998

www.secure-a-lot.com

year to have people stand there and check stickers," Douylliez said. With the **Secure-A-Lot** automated system, that cost was eliminated entirely. While he declined to list the cost for a **Secure-A-Lot** system, **Landman** said that because of the payroll savings, the Plymouth system paid for itself the first day.

In addition to the \$140 permit fee, the system has resulted in an additional \$4,000 in paid fines, and \$3,000 in fines tied up in court, Douylliez said.

**Landman** is excited that his contract machine vision company has successfully added some in-house developed stand-alone products to its revenue mix, with **Secure-A-Lot** being the latest.

"Historically, we've been doing contract work in traditional machine vision areas — applications like semi-

conductors," **Landman** said.

A few years ago, **Vision Machines** took technology it had developed to inspect products for consistent color and texture, and rolled that out as the **MatchIT Color Inspection System**. **Landman** liked the idea of having a saleable product so much he decided to take another concept he had been working on that inspects particles, from tiny grains of powder to small pebbles, and created the **Automated Sieve Certification System**.

But even those products were still pretty squarely in the traditional machine vision market. **Secure-A-Lot** steps way outside that market, and the partners hope to expand into other communities in Massachusetts and beyond.

"There's 120 towns in Massachusetts with sticker programs that (**Secure-A-Lot**) could potentially be used for," **Schulman** said. "Personally, I would like to see as many as 30 percent of these towns adopt it."

**Landman** says anywhere a sticker program is used to gain access can use their system, not just transfer stations. "Beaches, commuter lots — any type of facility that restricts access."

rbrown@masshightech.com | 617-316-3273



Landman



Schulman