

CHANGING MARKETS

LoJack's 'Bug' Fights A Stolen Car Epidemic

Maker of 'silent alarm' system has all the deejays talking

By Warren Berger

On a recent Monday morning, disc jockey Andy Mose of Boston's WROR-FM was spinning rock records when he was handed a script hot off the fax.

"We have another LoJack story here," Mose told his listeners. Then he read the *Dragnet*-style copy, which announced that a local car thief had been arrested after stealing a car "bugged" with a vehicle-recovery system made by LoJack Corp.

Mose ended the paid ad with an improvised wisecrack, which was fine with David Manly, LoJack's vice president of sales and marketing and author of the script. Manly believes that any mention of the product is good for business.

"The idea with these live-read radio ads is to create a sense that this is something people are talking about, a new way to fight car theft," he says.

LoJack's "bug," a tracking device, costs

about \$600 and is the size of a chalkboard eraser. It's installed by the company inside the body of a vehicle, and only the installer knows where it's hidden. When the car is stolen, its owner reports the theft to the police, who immediately send out a coded signal to activate the device. Then police squad cars track down the vehicle using a small LoJack computer.

While the tracker sounds like something out of *Dick Tracy*, LoJack's sales have been strong. Since the Boston company introduced the system in that city four years ago, it has sold 35,000 units and built a 90% consumer-awareness level. After two years in South Florida, the company is now expanding to New Jersey, a state that ranks No. 2 behind Massachusetts in auto theft. If all goes well, Michigan, Illinois and California will follow.

LoJack is one of four companies that market silent tracking systems, which are designed to keep cars from becoming spare parts. Although alarms still dominate sales of all car-protection devices, tracking systems are expected to give alarms a run for their money. For one, trackers need police cooperation, a major selling point. For another, alarms haven't slowed the rise in car thefts, and their ear-piercing screams have become a public nuisance.

Despite these ad-



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LoJack's unit (top) is hidden inside the car, and only the installer knows where. When a car is stolen, the owner calls the police, who send out a signal activating the device. Then they locate the car with a computer (bottom).

vantages, tracker marketers are faced with the daunting task of selling a product that doesn't begin working until a vehicle is stolen. "People are used to thinking in terms of prevention, not recovery," Manly says.

LoJack was founded in 1978, and its name comes from a play on the word hijack. The Massachusetts police began testing the system in 1984, and the tracking device became available to consumers in 1986. The company says 95% of all cars equipped with the device are recovered, and the time it takes to hunt down a vehicle averages about two hours.

Each time a stolen car is recovered using the LoJack tracking system—and that's happened about 1,000 times—Manly documents the information and creates a radio script, which he then faxes that week to as many as 10 stations. He often meets with deejays to explain the product in the hopes they'll chat about it after reading the live script.

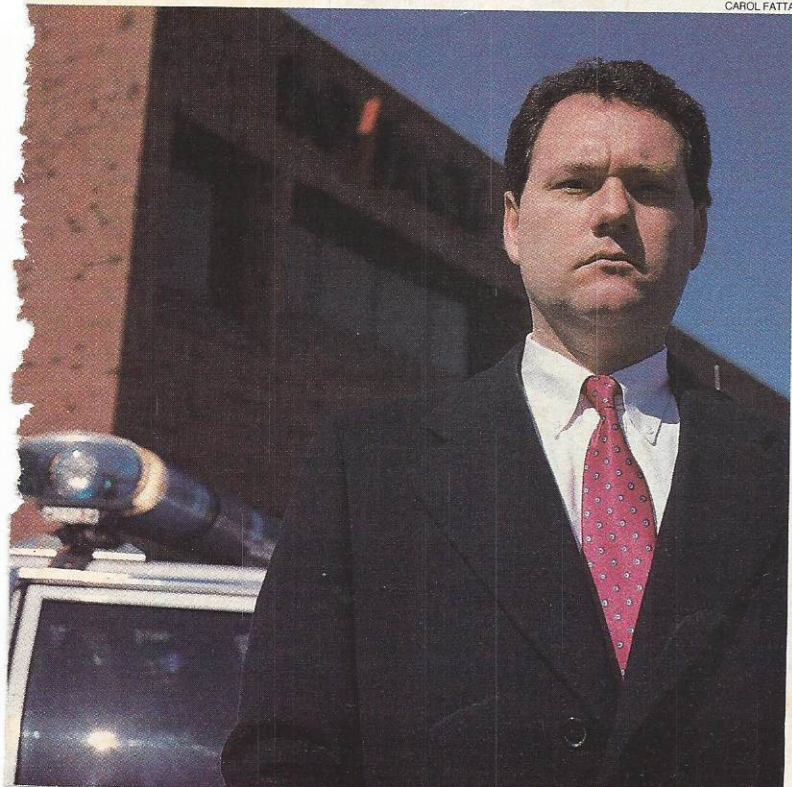
"We don't want this to be pitched like an ordinary product," he says. "We want people to discuss it the way they'd discuss news."

In New Jersey, LoJack is running a print campaign in about 10 major newspapers. It's also spending \$500,000 to buy time on local radio, where Manly's scripts will be used.

For now, LoJack will try to convince consumers that noisy alarms don't prevent car theft. "And they never will," says Manly. "That's why we're in business." ■

LoJack's Manly uses recovery stories in ads.

Warren Berger is a frequent contributor to AMW.



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