

Santa Cruz Firm Is A Giant In An Infant Industry

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Little, old Santa Cruz is the center of the infant remote electronic identification industry.

Identronix, which is located on 1718 Soquel Ave., is a pioneer and recognized leader in the field.

And before you yawn and turn to the sports section, let it be known that the firm is on the lookout for creative, technical people in the electronic field who want to be in on the beginning of a new field.

In the process of pioneering the field, Identronix has switched its emphasis from agricultural uses to the transportation industry.

And with the switch has come success!

The local firm has entered into an exclusive marketing agreement with General Railway Signal, Rochester, N.Y., for application of its radio-powered identification devices to all wheeled vehicles.

Identronix Chairman Norman Lezin said the five-year contract calls for purchases of approximately \$15 million of equipment.

In addition to the General Railway order, the firm has sold two complete systems to the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory to be installed in a dairy and feed lot.

The firm initially aimed its product at the dairy industry, and was the subject of a Sentinel feature story in August 1978. Identronix, which had been formed in 1976, focused its activities on developing commercial applications of remote animal identification using radio waves with modern integrated circuit "chip" technology.

And while the agricultural program has succeeded, it was found that many of the

applications offered dairy farmers have limited commercial usage.

"You might say that we found answers for questions that we didn't have," quipped Lezin, who is better known as a former chairman of the Santa Cruz Port District directors, and former city councilman and mayor of Santa Cruz.

Lezin said the company began to move in new directions with the hiring of Victor Grinich as president.

Grinich is best known as one of the founders 23 years ago of Fairchild Semiconductor Division of the Fairchild Camera and Instrument Co., one of Silicon Valley's pioneers.

In recent years he has been a professor at both Stanford and California in the field of electronics plus doing much outside consulting.

Rain, snow and other adverse environmental factors may still not stay the mailman from his appointed rounds, or so the post office insists. However, these same factors make it difficult to run object recognition systems operating on an optical basis.

And this is where Identronix comes into the picture.

The nation's railroads for years have been using an optical system. And it works when everything is ideal. But ideal conditions are rare.

Identronix's product offers the same advantages as an optical system, but when optically disturbing obstacles in the transmission path (raindrops, snowflakes, dust particles — even ice or mud directly on the moving object) do not interfere with the identification and logging process.

It doesn't take a genius to see the advantages of the system — or why it is so important to the transportation industry.

It allows railroads not only to keep

track of its rolling stock, but more importantly it allows the correct make-up of freight trains.

Too often, Grinich points out, the engineer of a train doesn't know the load factor involved in his train. "This can lead to serious accidents," he says. But with remote identification he'll know the load factors involved, and the correct operating procedure."

But the system also has applications with rapid transit, according to Grinich.

It is believed, and General Railway Signal agrees, that it will allow the better dispatch and use of rapid transit facilities.

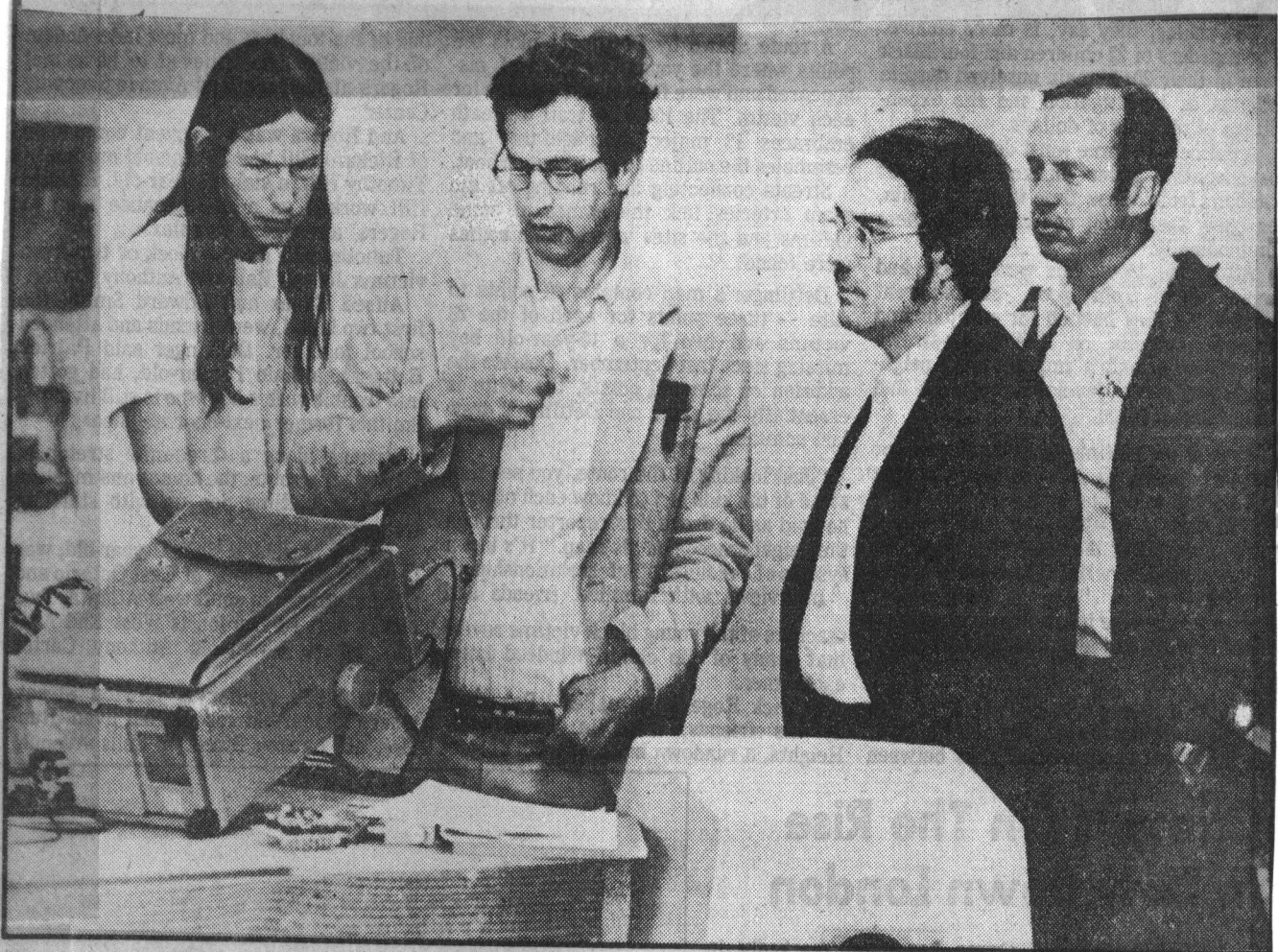
There is also application in controlling marine cargo containers, and in similar uses.

Key to the Identronix system is a small electronic device called the "transponder." In its original application, it was implanted under a cow's skin, but it can also be attached to a box car, bus, cargo container, etc. It receives a transmitted radio frequency signal, gathers information and then reflects information via an antenna back to the management system.

In addition to the obvious benefits of automatic identification, the transponder could also provide an excellent security device, in that containers fitted with the unit could not pass out of a terminal gate without being identified and crosschecked by the control system.

Identronix claims that the transponder can successfully identify objects at speeds up to 50 miles an hour, at ranges of 30 feet. For objects moving at a slower velocity, the range is said to increase significantly.

To sum it up in Grinich's words: "Identronix has moved from cows to cow-catchers."



Identronix's Dale Bayse and Victor Grinich and General Railway's Gene Fuller and Chis Howser.