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MORE MICHIGAN COMPANIES SHOW OFF AT CES

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Tuesday morning I visited half a dozen Michigan companies at the Sands convention center just off the Las Vegas Strip. That's where a lot of smaller, newer, more entrepreneurial companies exhibit at the International Consumer Electronics Show (while the main Las Vegas Convention Center tends to be more for big established names and appliance-type companies).

Once again, I came away inspired.

First stop was Identity Pal Inc., an Ann Arbor startup that launched its product only Dec. 18, and decided to come to CES just last fall.

Identity Pal is a sturdy, waterproof, shockproof USB device intended to carry emergency and medical information for kids, seniors, pets and whoever else might want it.

Company founders Scott and Jennifer Crawford got the idea for the company through parenthood and Jennifer Crawford's work as a nurse at the University of Michigan Hospitals.

Identity Pal can be used simply to carry basic identification and emergency medical information, or a highly detailed medical history. The user can decide which parts of that that information to make public to whoever might plug the USB into a computer, and which to keep private with 256-bit encryption.

Crawford's a mechanical engineer by education who worked initially for Ford Motor Co., then later for Internet companies designing backload infrastructure. "I got out before the bubble, I was lucky, and I've been an entrepreneur since," he said. His other businesses include real estate, agriculture and tech consulting.

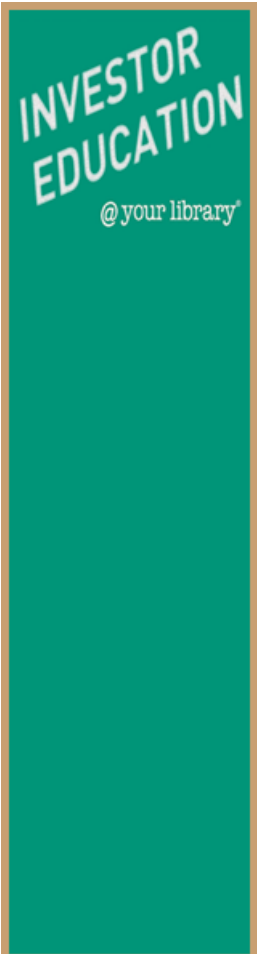
At CES, Crawford wants to talk to major retailers who want to put Identity Pal on their shelves for a \$39.95 suggested retail price. "We've gotten a tremendous response so far," Crawford said.

More at www.identitypal.com.

Then I swung by JDI Technologies, an Auburn Hills electronic cabling company that does business as GoldX. Account manager Joseph Maroni III showed me the company's hundreds of styles of inventory in their big booth. The company returned to CES this year after an absence of several years, Maroni said.

GoldX is using CES to roll out a new flagship product called XPO. It uses a USB connection to transfer data from device to device without having to use a computer -- including PCs, PDAs, cameras, cell phones and more. The device will retail for \$129.

JDI's existing cables, mice and keyboards are sold now at retailers ranging from



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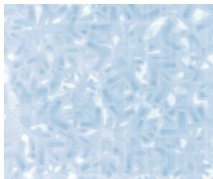
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Ritz Camera to Staples.

More at www.jditech.com.

From there it was over to Bing Technologies, the Canton Township American subsidiary of China's Bingle Power Co. Ltd.

Bing offers rechargers for just about everything, from phones to batteries.

But the coolest thing it was showing this year? A backpack with embedded solar cells capable of generating about four watts, with an adapter for recharging cell phones, cameras and camcorders.

The bag won't come cheap, though: think \$300.

I also got yet another look at Whirlpool Corp.'s Centralpark system, a refrigerator-top docking station for an increasing variety of electronics.

The Benton Harbor appliance maker started offering the system last year with a simple digital picture frame. Now it's expanding, with an iPod stereo, an electric white board, and my personal favorite, an extremely cool little tablet computer complete with family organizational software from a Seattle company called Cozi.

Whirlpool spokeswoman Trish Taylor told me the system is getting big-time media attention. I suppose you *could* try to remember where you read it first.

Next stop, Troy-based Sonic Alert, which has built a big business out of alarm clocks and other gear for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Ed Brink, the company's director of sales and marketing, noted that Sonic Alert doubled the size of its CES booth this year because of a new agreement just reached to be the United States and Canadian distributor of telephones for the deaf and hard of hearing from Geemarc Telecom S.A. of Grand Synthe, France.

Geemarc has the largest selection of amplified telephones and assistive listening devices in Europe. It's targeting the Baby Boomer generation, which is increasingly moving into the age where hearing difficulties are common.

Brink said he's hoping to meet with small and mid-sized retailers at CES, getting them to carry both Sonic Alert's existing and new lines.

One unexpected market, Brink said, is the so-called "hard to wake" market. To them, Sonic Alert sells the Sonic Boom alarm clock, with a hideously loud extension speaker that goes under the pillow. "The guys at ThinkGeek love that one," Brink said.

More at www.sonicalert.com.

My final stop was a company with the entirely unprepossessing name Humble Daisy Inc. Founder and CEO David Chmura of Ann Arbor was in the midst of a one-man marathon at his booth.

Humble Daisy offers ProfCast, which records live audio presentations and syncs them up with slide presentations, creating files that are suitable for podcasting.

The product is currently available only for Apple computers, but a PC version is coming soon, Chmura said.

Chmura said he and his wife work in Web development and created the product and the company. "I also work at the University of Michigan, which isn't involved in this company in any way, but I saw a lot of professors struggling with \$20,000 lecture capture systems that include video, or just used audio with garage band technology," he said.

ProfCast adds a little bit more professionalism to the product.

Chmura said he's been contacted at CES by representatives from the big guys -- Microsoft, Intel, Kodak -- and that he's encouraged by the response to his booth.

A free trial is available at www.humbledaisy.com.