

Keeping Universities and Cities Safe

By Ronald Goodman

Clearly the world has changed since the events of September 11, 2001. Our perception of danger has increased dramatically but still, for the ordinary citizen on the street the tools available for reporting suspicious activity have remained static. It is unquestionable that to dramatically improve the safety and security of our cities we must rely upon the millions of eyes of our fellow citizens as they pursue their daily activities. But the question remains, "How?"

Too many studies have shown a reluctance to report crimes or other suspicious activities for fear of authorities or criminal retribution. Too many Americans are inculcated with the belief that "*the authorities will attend to it*" without considering the appropriate law enforcement agency may be, probably is, unaware of the danger. While many domestic terrorist events are committed by those whose precedent actions, either by word or deed, were seen by those around them as odd, perverse or potentially damning, too often these observations go unreported for fear of involvement. Major news stories from our cities and universities attest to known antisocial behaviors going unreported. Virginia Tech, Northern Illinois University, Oakland and San Gabriel Calif., all come to mind. We know evil deeds will evolve from evil or demented people...the question is how to identify and prevent them.

A well known anti-terrorism official (name withheld at his request) recently expressed his view on prevention. "The ability to gather information, sift through it to find what is useful intelligence, and then rapidly get that information to the right people, can and has made the difference between tragedy and that tragedy being averted."

Obviously, the tools to fight terrorism must be many and varied. A new weapon in this war was recently introduced by Resilience, a Silicon Valley, Calif. innovator in applications to involve the citizenry in crime mitigation and prevention. Their new product, *TipNow*TM, is an anonymous text-based reporting system. As this is written a number of cities and universities are evaluating it and it is already being adopted by two campuses. The product uses SMS to report suspicious activities to the appropriate, pre-designated, officials. From any cell phone a text message describing questionable or obviously illegal activities is sent to a campus or city-wide e-mail address. The message is automatically encrypted by Resilience servers and forwarded to the appropriate law enforcement agency. All in minutes and all completely anonymous.

The reporting party, or 'tipster', is assigned by the server an alphanumeric alias that allows for follow-up while maintaining the promised anonymity of the tipster. The company hopes that by allowing citizen involvement without compromising their identity more people will be encouraged to participate in the process of making us all safer.

Picture/video attachments are also part of the system so, with the ubiquity of camera phones photo identification becomes an important adjunct. Plus, with addition of an executive dashboard (computer interface that displays the information) and analytical tools to help track the tips, *TipNow* has the potential to become an integral part of protecting our cities and universities. And best of all for money strapped agencies, the program is entirely web based, requiring no software or hardware installation and maintenance by the adopting agency.

Resilience is focused on creating back-office solutions that adapt to and enhance consumer products already in wide distribution. By creating software programs that interface with everyday consumer tools, e.g., cell phones and laptop computers, the company is committed to closing the loop on encouraging and supporting citizen involvement in making universities, cities and the country as a whole, safer.

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