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In the News...

From the New Mexico Business Weekly, June 22, 2007

Vibrant wins a demonstration contract with the Boeing Co.

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Vibrant Corp.'s first contract won't pay much, but it could be just the boost the fledgling aeroparts tester is looking for.

Boeing Co. signed a two-month, \$10,000 contract on May 31 for Vibrant to help Boeing evaluate a new method for manufacturing aerospace components, says Vibrant CEO Lem Hunter. Vibrant will test the components to see if the new process is making strong, uniform parts.

"It's just a small contract, but it gets us in the front door," Hunter says. "Boeing is one of the nation's two largest airframe manufacturers. If we demonstrate our capabilities there, it could lead to bigger contracts with Boeing, and with other companies."

Albuquerque-based Vibrant launched at the beginning of this year as a spin-off of Mechtronic Solutions Inc., an engineering and light electronics firm, which Hunter helped create in 1993.

Vibrant uses proprietary technology licensed from Quasar International to conduct non-destructive testing on aerospace components. Quasar built the system -- known as Process Compensated Resonant Testing -- for use by the automotive industry.

Originally developed at Los Alamos National Laboratory, the technology detects defects in parts by vibrating them and then applying advanced software algorithms to compare the resonant frequency generated with the resonance of a non-defective part.

Quasar, which spent \$10 million to develop the technology, first licensed its computational software to Exagen Diagnostics, which uses the system to search huge volumes of genetic information for medical diagnostics. Quasar itself was acquired early this year by Illinois Tool Works Inc. -- a \$14 billion corporation that owns 750 businesses in 49 countries.

Vibrant licensed Quasar's technology in 2005, and then operated as a division of Mechtronic while it adapted the technology for use on aerospace components.

Hunter says the system can save a lot of money for aviation companies, preventing the scrapping of parts until it's necessary.

"Current technologies just look at surface irregularities, which means parts often get discarded without knowing whether they're sound inside," Hunter says. "We can determine with great accuracy whether a part is good or bad, to get more use out of them. That's very important because we're talking about incredibly high-value parts that range up to \$800,000."

Since spinning off on its own, Vibrant has conducted pilot projects with engine builders Williams International and Rolls-Royce, and with Delta Airlines, to demonstrate its technology. Hunter expects those pilot demos to lead to paying contracts in July and August.

David Piotrowski -- principal engineer with Delta in Atlanta, Ga. -- says his company might well contract Vibrant now that it's seen the technology in action.

"I don't yet know if Delta will contract them, but the technology is very encouraging, enough so that we're taking a much closer look at it," Piotrowski says. "So far, it looks very promising."





In fact, Piotrowski says Vibrant's services could, potentially, lead to changes in standard inspection methods throughout the aviation industry.

"It could end up replacing or supplementing some of the inspection technology that's out there," he says. "Resonance, or vibrating technology, has been around a long time, but Vibrant is applying software algorithms to pull information out about parts and components that was there all along but was inaccessible before. This can tell us a lot of new things about parts and components at every level."

Vibrant is ramping up its workforce in preparation for new contracts.

It has hired four engineers since March, and will hire four more before year-end.

In addition, it received \$93,000 through the state's Job Training Incentive Program to help train new employees on its computational software.

"It's a challenge to master this technology, so we want to get employees up to speed and ready to hit the ground before new contracts are signed," Hunter says.

Vibrant closed in May on \$1 million in seed funding from angel investors.

Dave Durgin -- one of the investors and a general partner in the Verge Fund -- says Verge could lead a Series A round next year if Vibrant needs more money to finance growth.

"This is new technology, so there's always an adaptation period before customers are comfortable with it, but Vibrant is starting to get some name-brand customers," Durgin says.

"They might need additional funding after they sign up more companies. I think Verge would be quite interested in that when the time comes," he adds.

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