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Doug Belfiore, national account executive, and Yves Berliet, president of STOP, Security Tracking of Office Property, in Norwalk. The company sells two-and-a-half inch metal plates that prevent theft of lap top computers.

STOP device helps companies fight thieves

By ANDREW SCOTT

When U.S.T. Inc. experienced a rash of laptop thefts from its offices seven years ago, the Greenwich tobacco company turned to Norwalk-based STOP Inc. to remedy the problem.

"We decided that after having some laptops stolen in our building and field locations that by putting some kind of tag on them, it would make them less likely to be stolen," said Robert Doyle, project leader in the information technology department of STOP.

The tag Doyle speaks of is a 2-and-a-half inch metal plate that STOP has marketed in the United States since 1991 after obtaining rights from its French developer.

STOP, which stands for Security Tracking of Office Property, sells the tamper-proof security plate for \$8.75 each. It has a STOP logo and the

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words "stolen property" etched in on it, accompanied by an 800 number.

When thieves see the plate they know that the equipment will be hard to pawn or to sell to someone else because of the warning on it, said Doug Belfiore, national account executive with the company.

The 800 number is placed on the plate so that individuals dealing with stolen property, including pawn-shop owners or computer-repair technicians, can call STOP to report their suspicion that equipment is stolen.

Last year, sales of STOP's metal plates and the accompanying tattoo soared 25 percent, the company said.

Figures from the FBI indicate that 97 percent of unmarked items are never recovered when stolen. Companies, therefore, view the plate as an added layer of security.

"There's a lot of high-tech stuff out there to stop equipment from being stolen, but we are prevention driven. It's easier to stop a thief than to catch one," said Belfiore.

Office equipment, including laptops and other computers, fax and photocopying machines, palm pilots and cell phones, has long been a prime target of theft.

"The intention of the STOP plate is to keep honest people honest," said Belfiore, explaining the device's capability to deter employees from stealing office equipment.

Belfiore said the bulk of the company's more than \$1 million yearly revenue comes from commercial business and educational institutions attempting to overhaul their loss prevention efforts.

"The number of stolen laptops went to zero shortly after installing the plates. It really is a visible deterrent," said Doyle of the 2,000 pieces of equipment on which his company placed the plates.

Since the company began marketing the theft-prevention device, it has been used on a million pieces of equipment, said Yves Berliet, the company's president. A bar code on the plate also

allows clients to track marked items for inventory control.

Original equipment manufacturers, such as Dell Inc., install the security plates on purchases of laptops for those who request it.

Berliet said he takes his job seriously when he thinks of the person who can possibly have a laptop with five years of information on it stolen. "We want to make sure equipment is safe and in the hands of the right person."

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