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Safety sells for Wausau company

Businesses buy Child ID kits to give away, build reputation

By **Nick Sargent**

Wausau Daily Herald

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Ken Hoffmaster's job description seems counterproductive: Lead a company that makes a product consumers never pay for and hope to never need.

But since SafeAssured ID was established in Wausau in September 2004, it's been doing quite well.

SafeAssured, a missing-persons identification product, was developed by Wausau Financial Systems and then became its own company. Since then, SafeAssured has turned regional recognition into sales across the country.

In 2005, the company tripled its sales from the year prior, said Hoffmaster, president and chief operating officer. In the first five months of this year, the company already has surpassed last year's sales figures.

Early on, the company's owners -- Bob Weirauch and Bob Rajek -- declared the goal of making SafeAssured available to every parent in the United States and making it the gold standard in its industry because of its value.

Each kit gives families a miniature compact disc of digital fingerprint scans, a physical description and audio and video recordings of a person, usually a child. That can be given to police and distributed to media outlets within minutes of a child's disappearance. The first few hours after a runaway or kidnapping often are the most critical.



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Businesses and organizations across the country are purchasing systems from SafeAssured ID and giving away the identification kits as a way of performing community outreach. The identification package includes a mini CD with streaming video, digital voiceprint, a digital photograph, a full set of digitally scanned fingerprints and general physical information that can be given to police within minutes of a child's disappearance. *BUTCH MCCARTNEY/WAUSAU DAILY HERALD*

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About SafeAssured ID

Founded: 2004

Headquarters: One Corporate Drive, Suite 402, Wausau (Corporate Cove building).

Employees: Four full-time, two part-time

Owners: Bob Weirauch and Bob Rajek

Early research showed that consumers made the most use of the product when it was offered for free.

Type of business: Makes an identification system that uses technology to create kits that can be used in the event a child goes missing.

The company sells the systems to community organizations and businesses, which in turn hold public events where families can get the kits for free. Most of its competitors sell their kits directly to parents and other end users and their products are not as technologically advanced, Hoffmaster said.

"We developed this model so there is a benefit to the organization holding the event, as well," he said. "There are a variety of businesses that can identify with this cause -- who doesn't?"

SafeAssured has sold systems to community groups such as parent-teacher organizations, but it also has received orders from financial institutions, and most recently, a cosmetic dentist. Businesses offer the SafeAssured kits to customers and others as part of their community outreach efforts and to cement a positive brand recognition.

"I didn't want to go events and pass out bumper stickers. How impactful is a bumper sticker in someone's life?" said Ron Stark, general sales manager for News Talk 590 KTIE-AM in southern California. His station purchased a SafeAssured system to give away the kits at events. "In the back of my mind I was thinking, what could we do at these events that would make an impact?"

The SafeAssured system made an impact, and how. At the first event the station offered the kits, event organizers brought orange cones over to the booth to deal with the line caused by a two-hour wait.

To date, a SafeAssured kit has not been used to help recover a missing or kidnapped child. And Hoffmaster hopes that continues, even though the national attention that could follow from a successful case has great potential to increase sales.

Instead, the company hopes that parents use the guidebook that comes with the kit to prevent the need to use the identification tools. SafeAssured is giving the guidebook away for free downloads on its Web site through the end of the month in honor of National Missing Children's Day, which was Thursday.

"It's important for us that the kits not be used. It's one of the reasons were working with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children," Hoffmaster said. "For sales to take off nationally, it's a matter of getting more sales people out there. It's also getting the word out that this is not only a great product for families but it's a great vehicle for businesses to utilize as part of their marketing strategy."