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TIMES-7

Time flies when you're having fun. For a company that has only been around for 18 months, Times-7 has achieved a hell of a lot.

"We've filed six patents, we've got a product that has been commercialised, and we've been paid for timing events including the Tour of Southland [cycle race]," says chief executive Antony Dixon.

It's been a whirlwind existence for the Wellington technology startup, which specialises in innovative radio frequency identification (RFID) products. RFID — a system that enables tracing of objects using a system of tags and readers — has been talked of for at least a decade as a technology which will change the world. Proponents predict its applications will be so widespread it will become known as 'the internet of things'.

But its uptake has been stalled by hiccups, such as dealing with interference and cost. Which is where Times-7 is coming to the rescue: it concentrates on finding solutions for environments traditionally difficult for RFID, such as tracking high-speed objects or mostly metallic items. It has had success with timing sports events, vehicle identification, baggage handling and gas cylinder tracking.

But Dixon is realistic about the stage of life the company is at. "We're a small company that is still really a startup," he says. "We don't have a lot of revenue and we're using up shareholder funds."

So when the \$6 Million Investment Challenge came along, Times-7 jumped at the chance. As well as the chance of securing investor funding, Dixon believes the experience of honing the company's export plans has been invaluable.

"From a company development perspective we definitely want to go to the UK and Europe so it's good that [the challenge] has given us a reason to focus on why we want to go and to get us thinking about target markets."

Since it was founded in 2006, when RFID engineers Arthur Roberts and Theo Ehlen joined up with IT entrepreneurs Dixon and Murray Andersen and former Brierley Investments director Philip Mossman, Times-7 has had the goal of moving into overseas markets.

It has fine-tuned its cycle race timing technology on local events, but it has had interest from a major US company keen to take the system global after Times-7 demonstrated it at a club racing event in Cincinnati. It aims to make its system low cost and simple enough to be attractive to organisers of small races and clubs — a huge market in cycling-mad Europe.

And its baggage handling products are proving promising, too. After figuring out how to overcome interference problems that had troubled an RFID system at Schipol Airport in Amsterdam, Holland, the company was invited to set up a trial. Success there has seen it attract attention from elsewhere, too. Dixon says he's talking to New Zealand-based global baggage handling company Glidepath about using Times-7 systems to help Glidepath clients internationally.

"We've got other product designs, such as putting tags on to objects that have a heavy-metal content, such as beer kegs," says Dixon.

After so many years of talk, Dixon believes RFID has developed to the point where it is about to break into the mainstream. "There have been lots of case studies, lots of pilots but now its moving into real, full-scale applications."

And with technology able to overcome some of the hurdles that have dogged early RFID experiences, it could well be that Dixon and his company's timing is perfect.