



IMPORT EXPORT

Mapping it out

Who-Rae has developed the world's first safety device to prevent the theft of GPS systems from inside cars and is poised to take it global. By **Andrea O'Driscoll**

RETURNING TO HIS hire car after a retailer meeting about GPS systems, Chris Pawsey had one of those ideas that it's hard to believe no one has had before. As he was retrieving his GPS from the glove compartment, it occurred to him that given the worldwide success of global positioning systems someone really ought to design a safety device to prevent them from being stolen from inside parked cars. The result was Maplock, an anti-theft device that fixes your GPS to the steering wheel of your car, making it an effective and highly visible deterrent.

The theft of GPS devices is a huge international problem. According to the FBI the number of thefts in the US has increased by 700 per cent in recent years. Respected Boston-based website justolen.net estimates that 2.6 million GPS units will be stolen State-side over the next two years. Figures like these point to the enormous potential of Pawsey's invention, both here and overseas.

Maplock's parent company, Who-Rae, was founded by Pawsey's father in 2001. Chris joined the business three and a half years ago following a stint as a Key Account Manager for cosmetics distributor the Heat Group. "I was previously at the Heat Group, which is a distributor for Max Factor and

Covergirl, among others," he explains. "I was with them in a sales role for just under five years and then I moved across to Mattel for just under a year. The way things were travelling at Who-Rae, Dad needed more people around and I saw it as an opportunity to take myself away from what I was doing. The long-term plan had always been to join the family business, and this just seemed like the right time."

Who-Rae is a wholesaler specialising in car accessories, with additional stationery, clothing and beverage lines. While that makes it the perfect company to distribute a product such as Maplock, it was clear that they would need help with the product design and manufacture. "It took a few months before we really started to get traction with the product," explains Chris. "We tried to come up with the best way of producing it and decided we needed to pick the best engineering partners we could. In the end we partnered with a group of engineers from a leading industrial design agency called Cobalt Niche. They engineered the product here in Australia and really took it to where it is today in terms of the styling and the product's performance."

Maplock was finally ready for launch early this year, and Chris says that he had the major export markets in his sights from the outset. "We actually launched the

product to the trade at the Appex Trade Show in Las Vegas which targets a global retail audience," explains Chris. "Now, it's actually hit the shelves in a number of territories over the past few weeks. It's

currently available in Australia in SuperCheap Auto, Repco and Dick Smith, among others. Internationally it's for sale on Amazon.com and Canadian Tire and we recently signed a deal with Dectel, which gives them an exclusive licence to distribute Maplock throughout Europe. It'll be in shops over there in about six weeks."

American market

Of course, the biggest potential market is the US and Maplock stands to benefit from a series of relationships that Who-Rae has formed with some of the biggest retailers in North America in recent years. "We have previously sold seat cover kits and the like into the US and we do have a direct relationship with a number of retailers over there," explains Chris. "We deal direct with Walmart, Costco, Big Lots, Amazon and Target. We have one employee in the US who manages our Walmart account, but the rest is done from our base in Melbourne. The plan is to get Maplock into all of those stores."

While a lot of companies bide their time before tackling the US market, Who-Rae ►

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targeted it fairly early on in the piece by attending US-based trade shows and courting US clients. "We've had a stand at the Appex trade show for around six years now, so it was pretty early in the company's lifespan that we decided to really go after the American market" explains Chris. "We took a few products there early on and we had Walmart and some of the other big retailers come on to the stand to talk about them. It took two to three years before we actually bedded down success in those accounts. In terms of future growth, we absolutely see the direction the company needs to take as doing more business internationally."

Currently Who-Rae's revenues are split 60/40, with the majority coming from overseas, but a sizeable chunk still originating from domestic sales. "In terms of where the percentages will end up, it's a bit hard to tell, but we definitely see export taking up a bigger slice of the pie," says Chris. "We have sold some seat covers into Halfords in the UK before now but, other than that, Maplock is the first product that we've taken into Europe so that's really exciting."

Despite being closer to home, the Asian market has proved more problematic for Maplock to break into. "The Asian market

is an interesting one for us," explains Chris. "We've had a lot of interest from Japan, but the most popular GPSs over there have seven inch screens. Our product fits anything from a 3.5 inch screen to a five inch screen. The Japanese models are considered for trucks over here and our product doesn't fit them at the moment. It's something that we've been working closely with Japanese retailers on, but as things stand we haven't got the capacity to supply the Japanese market anyway."

Manufacturing capacity is likely to be an ongoing concern if the product takes off as hoped in the European and US markets. "One of the biggest issues we had in the first few months of production was that we couldn't keep up with demand — we're just getting over that now," explains Chris. "Capacity and scalability are probably the primary reasons why we sourced factories in China rather than anywhere else."

With the manufacturing organised and distribution networks in place, Who-Rae has started looking at marketing Maplock. "We're in the middle of a PR campaign," says Chris. "We're sending out press releases and following those up. With

GPSs sales are typically clustered around Father's Day and Christmas, so we're going to go ahead with television and radio

advertising towards the back end of the year."

Who-Rae currently employs nine full-time staff, and according to Chris it has reaped a host of benefits from running such a tight ship. "There are more family members involved than just myself and dad," he says. "My brother looks after our international customer group and my step-mum is our Financial Controller. We're run pretty lean, but we're a dynamic business and part of what we like to do is react quickly to opportunities. We've been able to capitalise on a lot of what has come our

way because of our ability to make decisions quickly."

And chief among those opportunities at present is Maplock. "Maplock isn't the be-all and end-all for Who-Rae," explains Chris, "but in terms of the opportunities associated with having a world-first product that retailers want and based on the demand we've seen so far, it's going to be a big part of our business going forward." ●

**For further information visit:
www.who-rae.com.au
www.gpsmaplock.com**



Chris Pawsey has taken his bright idea for an anti-theft GPS device to the world.