Australian company creates COVID-19 contact tracing tool for businesses

Adapting indoor Bluetooth asset tracking technology for the fight against COVID-19.

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA, May 12, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Melbourne-based Leash IT has adapted its LeashView asset tracking system to enable employers to conduct COVID-19 contact tracing in the workplace.

Protect your staff and company with indoor tracking and contact tracing

The product, originally developed to track everything from medical personnel to shipping containers, is one of a number of systems now marketed as tools for protecting businesses from COVID-19. They include wearables that trigger alerts if wearers get to close to each other.

Unlike the Australian Government's COVIDsafe app, LeashView records the approximate location of employees and visitors while they're on a business's premises. It also shows who they've been in contact with while at work and where the contact occurred.

If an employee tests positive to COVID-19, a business could use LeashView to learn about that employee's movements while at work, and which equipment and people they had been in contact with.

Businesses could also use the system to receive alerts if employees or visitors enter workplace areas deemed off limits because an employee has fallen ill. They could also set rules about how many people can be in certain areas, and receive alerts if those rules are broken.

LeashView relies on businesses installing Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) gateway devices throughout their premises. It also requires employees and visitors to wear BLE tags, which can be hung from lanyards or attached to or used as name badges. The gateways report on the location of the tags via WiFi every 10 seconds.

Leash IT CEO and founder Tony Lotzof sees this technology helping businesses minimize disruption if a staff member becomes ill.

"LeashView shows me all the people an infected person came into contact with and the areas where they came into contact. So, I can just isolate the specific rooms the infected person entered, the people who were in the same room, the rooms those people subsequently entered, and all the other staff they made contact with," he said.

"So instead of shutting down the whole business, I just need to make sure the areas an infected staff member visited are isolated and sterilised, and that all the staff who came into contact with them are sent to self-isolate and be tested. The rest of my business can continue. I don't need to shut my doors."

Lotzof says apps designed for broader public use, such as the COVIDsafe app, do not meet

businesses' need to protect their operations from COVID-19. "Individual contact tracing through a government app is great. That way the government can see exactly who's come into contact with an infected person. But COVIDsafe does not track where the user has been, so it does not help businesses respond effectively to an infected person being on their premises," he argues.

In addition to helping businesses trace workers' movements, LeashView could minimise the risk of a business being disrupted by false alerts from an app like COVIDsafe, according to Lotzof. For example, a 'contact' that took place between two people on opposite sides of an office window could be ruled out as an infection risk, because tag locations are shown on a floor plan Multiple Australian sporting organisations and construction, manufacturing and TV and film production companies have expressed interest in using LeashView to monitor employees who are confined in tight spaces together, Lotzof says.

Potential users also include nursing homes, where there is an increased need to protect residents.The company is also working with "a number of global channels to make sure that as many businesses as possible can access this as quickly as possible."

Public vs private spaces

Lotzof acknowledges that mobile apps like COVIDsafe have raised privacy concerns, but says these concerns do not apply in a workplace.

"Privacy in the workplace is different. The employer is trying to make sure the company's doors stay open," he says. "The business also has OH&S risks that need to be identified, assessed and, where possible, mitigated to protect staff. Staff want to ensure continued employment and protect their work mates as well as the rest of the work force – therefore the relationship between the two has become even more important".

"Employers already track staff and visitors comprehensively. There are ingress and egress controls that register when someone enters and leaves a facility, or a location within it. Meeting rooms are booked and the participants registered in booking systems," he says. "I also think there's a lot more trust between the business owner and the staff member. Without the staff member trusting that the business owner is doing the right thing, the owner can't continue the business. And the company's not going to be able to make this work unless the staff member lets them know that they're infected."

Lotzof says LeashView gateways transmit data in an encrypted state, and each company's data is stored "in a secured private server, behind enterprise security firewalls." "Only administrators with a pre-approved secure login can access the companies own data via a secure encrypted web site. There is no third party access to any of the company or user data whatsoever," he says.

Lotzof sees a need for this type of contact tracing solution for workplaces, in addition to those designed for broader public use, such as the COVIDsafe app. And he predicts heightened duty-of-care for employees and visitors -will become the "new norm".

He sees managed contact tracing becoming an important tool to enable that. "Personally, I'm not going to let any contractor through the door and risk closing my business down and sending all my staff home, without them accepting that while they're here they're going to be tracked so that accurate tracing can be done to protect my workforce".

"The data collected in my business is not going to go anywhere outside my business. No one else is ever going to get this information. But in my business's four walls, I need to protect myself and my staff and I need to ensure I get to keep my doors open and my employees employed."

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