

Headphone manufacturer makes noise

Pro Tech Communications of Fort Pierce is winning awards and customers

By Kate Grusich
 staff writer
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FORT PIERCE — Pro Tech Communications might still be a relative unknown in its back yard.

But the Treasure Coast firm is making a name for itself in the headset industry.

"We've got a very good label and a very good name," said President Richard Hennessey. "Things are really starting to turn over."

Pro Tech develops and distributes lightweight communications headset products and systems, working with customers ranging from McDonalds and Taco Bell to NASA and Boeing. The publicly traded firm (OTCBB:PCTU) was founded a decade ago by Keith Larkin, widely considered the father of the headset industry.

Those familiar with the field will recognize several of Pro Tech's items, such as the Apollo series of headsets for office and call center environments, the ProCom line for drive-through restaurant personnel and the Trinity closed-back headsets.

But with its NoiseBuster headphone now marketed directly to the consumer — and gaining popularity through Web sites such as Amazon.com — the firm's name might soon become more common to the masses.

"There is no other headphone on the market today that can deliver the level of active noise reduction offered by this one," said Hennessey.

The NoiseBuster was initially introduced a few years ago through The Sharper Image, a specialty retailer that provides innovative, high-quality products. The NoiseBuster item quickly found a fan base, winning awards from groups such as Discover magazine and the Electronics Industries Association.

But Pro Tech is back again with a new and improved version of the headphone, which electronically reduces background noise. Proponents say it's ideal for folks flying on airplanes or riding subways, exercising or even mowing the lawn. And, of course, it could also be used by music lovers simply looking for more sound clarity.

Hennessey is also in discussion with various retail centers, in the hopes of getting NoiseBusters onto store shelves and furthering access to consumers.

The price tag of \$69 might sound like a lot, but company officials say competing noise-canceling headphones run as high as \$299.

Pro Tech operates out of a 13,000-square-foot office in the Orange Blossom Mall. A staff of about 15 handles everything from sales to piecing together the various headset lines.

About 3,000 product units are kept in the storage room, ready for shipment and delivery. From 2,000 to 5,000 are shipped out each month.

"We can produce close to 150 units a day, if need be," said Hennessey. "About 60 percent of them are made here."

Pro Tech is a subsidiary of the Westport, Conn.-based NCT Group. In exchange for shares, the Fort Pierce firm obtained an exclusive worldwide technology license from the parent company, covering numerous patents and innovations. They also garnered the exclusive right to market brands such as NoiseBuster.

"We joined forces with them in 1999," said Hennessey. "They focus on engineering and we provide the market analysis and concentrate on how to distribute them and market them. It's been very successful."

Although Pro Tech is becoming a market leader in the headset industry, company officials say they don't plan on leaving Fort Pierce anytime soon.

"We're not going anywhere," said Hennessey. "Everybody here is local ... We're positioned exactly where we want to be."

For more information, visit www.protechcommunications.com.

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JUAN DALE BROWN
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Mike Sullivan of Pro Tech Communications checks out a pair of NoiseBuster headphones before shipping. The Fort Pierce-based company's products are gaining in popularity through such Web retailers as Amazon.com.