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## Cool Company breaks your data for safe storage

By **KATHERINE CONNOR**, The Daily Transcript  
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San Diego has no dearth of cybersecurity firms. There are so many, in fact, that the industry created a Cyber Center of Excellence to advocate for, assist and help grow these firms and the region's reputation as a hub for the industry.

One company promising a unique solution to part of the ever-evolving problem is **Fhoosh**, a data encryption platform and 2015 San Diego Venture Group Cool Company.

"The idea was to take data at rest, break it apart and disassociate it from the user's identity," said Eric Tobias, CEO and co-founder of Fhoosh and an engineer with history at several other local players like **Applied Microcircuits** and QThink, which was acquired by **Qualcomm** (Nasdaq: QCOM).

"Here's a simple example: Take a medical X-ray that has metadata associated with it, meaning the patient's name, doctor's name, statistical information about the X-ray itself. We break that apart and separately encrypt — or break apart the metadata image — and separately store the broken-up elements dispersed among different data stores," Tobias said.

Here's another way to visualize what Fhoosh does through its User Identity and Data Disassociation process: When dealing with a social security number, one digit would be stored in database one, while three others might be in database two and another in database three, and so on.

Even if someone were able to hack into that storage site, the digits alone would be useless.

Tobias said Linda Eigner, Fhoosh's co-founder and president, concocted the original idea for the product while working as a divorce financial analyst in the early 2000s and watching clients complete the same complex forms time and time again.

She wanted to find a better way to automate part of the process by having data saved and entered into the appropriate field, but still ensure the security of this private information.

Now Fhoosh has 15 patents pending and two products in its repertoire: bankLevel cybersecurity to store and secure data, and powerClick to allow for this form automation and to ease e-commerce transactions.

"Fhoosh has definitely been built the right way; that is, with security baked in from the outset, and I think Fhoosh will make a real difference in cybersecurity," said Stephen Cobb, a San Diego-area IT security veteran on the Fhoosh advisory board.

Not only is the storage more secure, but Tobias said Fhoosh's proprietary software also allows users to store their data five times faster than standard, unencrypted data. The cloud-based storage solution is designed as an added layer of protection and meant to work in tandem with firewalls, encryption and other cybersecurity technology.

"We're really trying to bring two things to the market: superior encryption and superior performance — being able to put data in a data store and retrieve it quickly," Tobias said. "This translates to a better user experience in the end and lower cost."

Due to the nature of the industry, Fhoosh — which is an onomatopoeia for the sound that data would presumably make as it's rapidly stored — isn't able to share information about any existing or current customers, other than to say it is in the customer implementation phase.

Tobias said the products are needed in most major verticals, particularly the financial industry, health care, government, insurance and retail.

"Across all industries, big data is growing at an exponential rate and everybody has liabilities they're protecting," he said.

What Fhoosh officials can say is that the products have been tested by three separate cybersecurity firms, none of which were able to even get through the Web interfaces. So Fhoosh opened the doors to the databases for them, but even still, the experts were unable to decipher anything since the data was dissociated from its meaningful parts.

Tobias said the Venture Group and its Cool Companies program — which paired 30 local startups with 30 venture companies from across the country for an afternoon of pitching and conversation — have been great resources for the company, even though it's largely self-financed.

Contrary to a common complaint in San Diego, Tobias said, he has had no problem finding and recruiting talent for the team, and plans to keep Fhoosh in San Diego.

"I think there's world-class talent at all levels in San Diego," he said. "Same thing with our advisory board — we've been very fortunate across not just security for the advisory board, but business, marketing, legal."

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