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Frank Roark, president, Advanced Traffic Control, USA

# Interview

## Business-wise, how was 2002?

Slower than 2001. A lot of the projects that were anticipated for 2002 disappeared in the shadow of the terrorist attacks of 11 September. The state governments are all in tight financial times, with most deferring the type of projects that we would normally pursue.

## How is 2003 shaping up? Is the recession in the US as serious as we are led to believe?

I think that 2003 will be better than 2002, but not significantly. Some projects just can't be put off forever, so we're starting to see some activity. I think that the uncertainty about Iraq is affecting projects too, as cities and states try to decide how war might effect their funding. I think it's pretty clear that people, companies, and especially governmental agencies in the US are watching their money closer than they were a few years ago. I hope that the DOTs that have projects pending will go ahead and put them out.

## Where do you see Advanced Traffic Control's position within the US market and the global ITS industry?

In the US market for roadway tunnel control systems, I'd like to think we've shown ourselves to be the industry leader. We've done three tunnels for the Virginia DOT and all were completed on time and on budget. While these were requests-for-proposals, where price is just one component of the selection process, we were still consistently lower in cost than our competitors.

Our system architecture, with off-the-shelf SCADA products as a core philosophy, was specified by the Colorado DOT for a tunnel through the Rocky Mountains. Our continuously-available fault tolerance system under Windows 2000, in use in the Monitor-Merrimac Memorial Bridge-Tunnel (*Traffic Technology International Annual Review 2002*, p42-46) also allows system maintenance with no downtime. This solution has proven to be both less expensive and

superior to the costly commercially available fault-tolerant systems installed in other tunnels.

We have experienced exposure to the global market – thanks to *TTI*! We have had several inquires from companies doing tunnel projects outside the US. Some of the projects sound exciting and we have had some email dialogue. However, being a small company means some limitations. We have been exploring the possibility of teaming up with a couple of larger companies to do projects worldwide with them in the future.

**Do you think that if London's congestion charging scheme is a success, it may have a positive impact in other cities around the world? 31 cities have expressed firm interest in implementing the scheme so far, and it would surely help some US cities. The idea being that if it can work in London it can work anywhere, but what would the people of Florida [ATC's home state] make of having to pay to drive downtown?**

I think the real measure as to whether the congestion charging scheme will work in any given city is the availability of convenient and safe mass transit. In America, people will generally go where they want to go. If they can do it a lot cheaper while still feeling safe by using mass transit, they probably will and the congestion charging scheme will work. If it's a case of going and paying or not going at all, most will go and pay. So if you have congestion charging, but not adequate mass transit, then I think that you would just end up with the same congestion, but a much fattened city treasury – surrounded by angry demonstrators protesting about both the congestion and the fees.

## What do you feel have been the most important advances in ITS over the past year or so?

I think the most important advance that specifically effects our business is the maturing of the standards. As more projects are done using the standards, some of the rough edges are being smoothed. I see this continuing for a few more years. While our technology allows us the flexibility to conform to whatever the standards are at that point, it's always nice when the standards haven't changed from one project to the next. In the ITS world at large, I'm excited about the

the Virginia DOT received the Virginia DOT Commissioner's Award of Excellence for the projects we've done together.

**The standards process in the majority of the traffic technology equipment fields is a long, arduous one, largely due to necessity. Is that the same for you in the traffic control sector?**

Not so much. As system integrators we're only bound by whatever standards are in place when we start each project, and they are specified by the bid package. I know the guys in the public sector labor over getting the standards specified properly within the bid package. Because the technology we use is state of the art object oriented and client/server, we don't have any problem meeting required standards. ■

dedication of frequencies for short range communications for ITS. I see a huge potential for vehicle-to-roadway and vehicle-to-vehicle communications.

**What are your ambitions for 2003? The success of the Monitor-Merrimac Memorial Bridge Tunnel has, presumably, significantly upped your profile.**

We're working towards forming an alliance that will enable us to incorporate our technology in a tool-kit for creating our style of successful traffic management centers. We like to use the phrase 'custom, off-the-shelf' to describe how we use off-the-shelf software as the core of our projects. This is clearly the trend within technology companies. IBM calls it 'business on demand'. You can see it in the evolution of Microsoft's Visual Studio. Let the customer do what they want to do, with the absolute minimum of required new development. Buying and configuring somebody else's software is obviously cheaper and quicker than creating new software. We'd like to build on that to expand our market beyond just being a system integration company. *TTi* has definitely helped us get some name recognition. The success of the Monitor-Merrimac Memorial Bridge-Tunnel project has been a visible one, especially after our team mates from within