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Software firm unveils program to beat costly computer failures



by *PETER RANSCOMBE*

A SOFTWARE firm that traces its origins to Scottish Enterprise’s controversial Intermediary Technology Institutes (ITIs) has developed a program to help avoid the computer chaos that saw investors lose tens of millions of dollars on the day Facebook floated.

Edinburgh-based Contemplate has created software that can spot problems with lines of coding in other computer programs, allowing engineers to fix errors before they cause costly mistakes.

Contemplate’s software differs from other testing programs because it can tackle very complex coding that runs on modern dual and quad-core processors, which can carry out more than one instruction at the same time.

Chief executive Derick James said software failures had been blamed for the problems the Nasdaq stock exchange experienced when Facebook

floated and for Knight Capital's loss of \$457 million (£284 million) in just 40 minutes earlier this year.

The ITIs were launched in 2003 by then First Minister Jack McConnell to develop technology in the digital media, energy and life sciences arenas that could give Scottish companies advantages in niche areas.

The ITIs had a projected budget of £450m over ten years but were scrapped in early 2009, with their work being folded back into Scottish [Enterprise](#) itself.

Don Sannella, professor of computer science at Edinburgh University, and David Aspinall, a reader in computer science at the university, were among the researchers who worked on ITIs projects.

They founded Contemplate in 2009 and have licensed some of the ITIs research from Scottish [Enterprise](#) to create ThreadSafe, the company's first product.

Scottish Enterprise funded Contemplate last year with a £70,000 feasibility grant, which was matched by the firm's directors, and then a £230,000 research and development grant earlier this year, which was again match-funded by the company.

James expects Contemplate to turn over about £350,000 during its first year of commercial operations next year and is targeting up to £6m of sales over the next five years.

James said: "These aren't the kind of software failures that happen all the time but, when they do, they have catastrophic consequences.

"The investment banks that we have shown our software to have been very interested in it and one of them already wants to build it into their testing systems."

Eleanor Mitchell, director of commercialisation at Scottish Enterprise, added: "This licence deal demonstrates that companies based in Scotland can access homegrown technology. And with the public sector investing in technology early research, the companies can focus their resources on rapid product development, helping them get to market quicker."

Mitchell added: "Contemplate is a start-up company with ambitions to grow quickly and it will reap the benefit of new technology to secure new - customers, new markets and new growth opportunities at home and abroad.

"Scotland needs more high growth, globally ambitious companies like Contemplate to help our economy recover."

Scottish Enterprise said the technology licenced by Contemplate is from its £4.3m Software Integrity Engineering large-scale research and development programme. The economic development agency has also been supporting the [software company](#) through its "high-growth start up team".

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