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Tracking minor details to catch terror suspects

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* Business intelligence

AS US troops scour Pakistan's frontiers for signs of Osama bin Laden, software developed by a small Australian company is playing its part in the war on terror.

Sydney company NetMap Analytics is one of an exclusive club of business intelligence and complex systems software vendors with entree to the national security world, with its technology used by national security organisations in Australia, the US, the UK, Europe and Israel. The company is reluctant to discuss how the software is used, but similar packages deployed in the US allow investigators to identify suspicious patterns of travel, spending and behaviour. The company's core product -- which uses maps to demonstrate links between disparate pieces of data -- is also used by the Federal Police and NSW Police in crimes ranging from murder to fraud.

NetMap founder and chief scientist John Galloway is eagerly pushing the same technology that helped NSW Police catch backpacker murderer Ivan Milat, and helped authorities nab rogue options trader Simon Hannes, into the corporate realm to help cut costs and eliminate wastage. ”That is where the growth in the business intelligence market will be over the next few years,” he says.

Galloway says companies will increasingly be required to store and use more data under new corporate governance regimes, such as Basel II and the US Patriot Act. ”If they're not at the moment, they will soon,'' he says. “They will be under pressure to do so, because the competition will be.

”There's no question there's a lot of upside to business intelligence and analytics.” Galloway is circumspect on how NetMap is being used to catch terrorists, but does admit the unique mapping technology is ideal for relating links such as plane tickets, credit card purchases and phone records, the minutiae that is often the downfall of terror networks.

But he is particularly excited about using the technology to catch shoplifters, insurance fraudsters and money launderers, which is where analysts predict the business intelligence market will see the greatest growth.

”It's about finding unusual patterns in lots of data, so there's a fair bit of fraud detection activity involved,” he says. “We see transactions like an ecosystem -- it's not good enough to just average things.”

Galloway says many business intelligence vendors only analyse exceptions.