

DETECTION COMES OUT OF THE LAB AND INTO THE STREET



A new British company scores a world first in instrument design, which could change the face of scientific detection

The young, British company behind Diageo's new method of detecting counterfeit whisky is sAd (Spectroscopic & Analytical Developments).

In finding an answer to Diageo's brief, this fledgling company has designed the world's first hand-held UV spectrophotometer, a groundbreaking product that has the potential to revolutionise scientific methods of detection.

Until now it's been down to men and women in white coats working in labs to identify counterfeit whisky or perfume, to screen blood stains from the scene of the crime or to detect contamination in river water. sAd's work means that many such tests could be carried out in situ by an unskilled operator – more quickly, more simply and more cheaply than before.

Diageo recruited sAd to work on its authentication project after Diageo's Senior Scientist, Dr Willie MacKenzie, identified sAd as the UK's specialist in this area. Director of sAd Jon Considine says: "It was a very positive relationship. Right from our first meetings in mid 2002 we have worked very closely with Diageo. Although we went from concept to prototype in less than four months, we have been developing a brand new instrument and it hasn't all been a smooth ride."

But why didn't an existing manufacturer come up with the idea first?

sAd director Dr John Ferguson says: "We're not really instrument designers. What we have at sAd is a wide range of skills and knowledge in electronics, optics and physics which allowed us to look at new developments."

Ferguson says: "I see it as a disruptive technology. We're taking lab instruments out of the lab and away from the skilled technician and putting them out into the field."

Jon Considine describes how the instrument's technical design sets it apart: "The central unit is designed with its own easily adapted software, allowing it to make on-the-spot analysis. And any interchangeable modules are also processor-controlled. Because it's modular we can tailor it rapidly and effectively for other uses."

He adds: "Until now you needed lab instruments to identify counterfeit whisky or perfume, to screen blood stains from the scene of the crime or to detect polluted water. sAd's work means that many such tests could be carried out on the spot – more quickly, more simply and more cheaply than before."

Diageo's investment in the development and sAd's own self-financing have allowed this small, British company to make a breakthrough. Only now has sAd been in a position to announce the launch of the instrument. The company is now investigating potential markets and talking with a number of high profile organisations, as well as considering suitable outside investment to make this into a world beating commercial success.

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