



Tracking your car by cell and e-mail

By Brian Bergstein, The Associated Press

PALM DESERT, Calif. — Here's something that might appeal to your fretful or data-loving side: a service that alerts you if your car is stolen — or being driven too fast by the teenager who borrowed the keys.

Among the nearly 70 emerging technologies on display this week at the DEMO conference is a system from Chandler, Ariz.-based Inilex, which uses global-positioning satellites to track the location of customers' cars and deliver a bevy of other information.

The Inilex "Kepler Advantage" device, sold through car dealers for \$600 to \$1,100 plus a monthly subscription, looks like a walkie-talkie and gets stowed covertly under the dashboard. Then car owners or corporate fleet managers can go on an Inilex website to track their vehicles' locations — and set up alerts that would be delivered by e-mail or a cell-phone text message. With this service, you can be notified within minutes that your parked car has been moved, presumably by a thief, and shown where it is in real time — fruitful information to pass on to police.

Or you can set up a "virtual fence" on a map and be told if the car ranges outside it (attention, suspicious spouses). Paranoid parents could halt their kids' late-night joyriding by letting Inilex warn them when the car exceeds a certain speed.

In May, Inilex is upgrading its service to grab data from many cars' onboard computers so customers can monitor their vehicles' fluid levels and other vital signs on the Web. The connection to the auto's computer also lets Inilex drivers use cellphones to remotely start, lock or unlock their cars.

Some of these features are already available through such services as OnStar for General Motors cars and LoJack's stolen-car trackdown product. But LoJack isn't available nationwide; it uses an older radio-frequency technology rather than GPS and gets activated when owners call police.

Inilex has only 5,000 customers so far, so time will tell whether its extra features can swipe serious business from the \$695 LoJack service, which boasts 5.8 million customers in 28 countries. One big test, in particular, will be whether it can beat LoJack's stolen-car recovery rate, which spokesman Paul McMahon said is more than 90%.