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Sensear sounds out market

Mark Beyer

FORMER Wesfarmers executive Bob Denby and Empired co-founder Justin Miller have teamed up to commercialise a Western Australian invention that tackles the world's most common occupational illness – hearing loss.

Their company, Sensear Pty Ltd, is moving into the final phase of its commercialisation plan after obtaining seed funding from Perth investor and company director Charles Morgan, who has acquired a 40 per cent shareholding.

Sensear has also obtained \$64,000 in funding under the federal government's Comet program for emerging technology companies.

Its technology enables people working in high noise environments to talk without having to remove their headphones or earplugs.

The technology combines highly directive microphones and unique software to filter the different sounds so that speech is enhanced while ambient industrial noise is suppressed.

Mr Miller said Sensear planned to introduce the technology to the market by 2007.

He believes there will be strong international demand for the technology, based on rising compensation costs associated with hearing loss and new government legislation on standards for workplace noise.

The company has completed trials in industrial and commercial environments, including an iron ore mine at Pannawonica, an alumina refinery at Kwinana and a cement manufacturing plant.

"The feedback we have gained from the product testing has been extremely positive," Mr Miller said.

The next step in the commercialisation plan is an international roadshow to introduce the technology to companies that produce hearing protection equipment.

Mr Miller said Sensear was



BUSINESS IS LISTENING: Sensear chief executive Justin Miller (left) and chairman Bob Denby are working to commercialise a local invention that aims to alleviate hearing loss in the workplace.

Photo: Tim van Bronswijk

currently evaluating the best path to market, which could involve licensing the technology to existing manufacturers of hearing equipment, manufacturing the circuit board or producing the complete product.

The company had sufficient funding to pursue the different options.

Mr Miller said the search for funding had been a frustrating and time-consuming experience for Sensear, which had approached several venture capital funds.

The funding problem was resolved when the company met Mr Morgan, who has interests in a wide range of oil

and gas and technology projects, including Alto Energy and ComodiTel.

As well as being a 40 per cent shareholder, Mr Morgan will be a non-executive director of Sensear.

The company will be chaired by Mr Denby, who was managing director of Wesfarmers' Sydney-based industrial and safety products division until December 2005.

He has 25 years' industry experience, dealing direct with many of the companies that are potential licensees or distributors of Sensear's technology.

Mr Miller has 18 years' experience in the technology sector, most recently as founder and joint managing director of software firm Empired, which grew to have 70 staff and a multi-million dollar revenue base.

The fourth director will be Melbourne-based Greg Beale, who will run the sales and marketing function.

Sensear's technology was invented by Sven Nordholm of the Western Australian Telecommunications Research Institute, a joint venture between the University of WA and Curtin University.