Pelatron's Networking-on-the-Move system improves battlefield communications

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Product: Networking-On-The-Move is a battlefield-ready networking and telecommunications system designed and manufactured by Pelatron, a Native Hawaiian-owned engineering and technology firm based in Mapunapuna.

Senior VP and chief engineer Branson Aken describes NOTM as a mobile, modular "command-and-control" (C2) system commissioned by the U.S. Marine Corps to provide continuous voice, data and video streaming for troops in the field. "The command-and-control element," he says, "is for the decision-makers, the influential field commanders, to have better data from the boots on the ground, so they can make better decisions during tactical operations."

Pelatron's Networking-on-the-Move system uses wireless and satellite communications technology to link a hub vehicle with other ground vehicles, foot soldiers, aircraft and the command center.

Illustration: Courtesy Pelatron

Need: Aken says the Marines' interest in improved C2 goes back at least to Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. "Many times, as they were mobilizing their troops, they would outrun their communications and lose control of battlefield tactical operations." They needed a mobile system that could be vehicle-based with long range, he says. The Marine Corps has already invested about $90 million in Pelatron's NOTM technology, which links radio and satellite data in a secure, reliable, "over-the-horizon" system.

Market: The next step is "fielding" – actually using NOTM in live operations. Aken says that Pelatron "is in a low production phase" – that is, actually manufacturing a limited number of systems for the various Marine Expeditionary Forces. The Army and the Navy have also shown interest in NOTM, and other users could include allied countries, hospitals and disaster-relief agencies.

Challenges: "Right now," says director of corporate communications Janice Kato, "we're the small company that has a technology that's considered an urgent need by Marine Corps Systems Command. But that's temporary." Pelatron has competition on multiple fronts. "All the big boys – the Raytheons, General Dynamics, Boeings and Lockheeds of the world – they all have their own type of

C2 elements," Aken says. "There are also small businesses looking at what we've done and the success we've had and saying, 'We can compete in this market, too.' Our challenge with the big companies is just resources and influence. With the smaller companies, it's the innovation piece. They're just like us. They can create something in the garage today and put

that on the market tomorrow."