

SpyTech: Taking care of the 007 in you

By Greg Kowalski
staff writer

Remember James Bond's car, the one with the machine guns behind the headlights, the one that pumped an oil slick on the road as it tossed a bad guy into the air via a passenger-side ejection seat?

Guess what. You can have your own Bondmobile that "is completely impervious to bullets, bombs and attack. Available options include tear gas, oil slicks, anti-kidnaping systems, hidden gun portholes, remote starter and other customized systems."

So reads item No. 332 in the Spytech Co.'s catalog of "sophisticated security (devices) at sensible prices."

Spytech is a New York-based firm that, despite the seemingly melodramatic trappings of James Bond, deals with the deadly serious business of security.

"Deadly" is not too strong of a word. The company was founded in 1984 by Ed Sklar, a former real estate and investment professional. After the father of a colleague was assassinated in Latin America, Sklar began investigating ways to protect his friend.

What he found was a business waiting to be filled.

The growing firm employs about 32 people and deals with a host of suppliers.

Here's a sampling of the devices that Spytech sells, as described in its catalog:

- **WRISTWATCH** camera: It's fitted into a working, ordinary-looking, fully operational wristwatch. "It's easy to operate, has a high resolution, a precision lens and focusing depth from one millimeter to infinity." Cost is \$1,500.

- **Portable telephone scrambler:** It mounts on any telephone and garbles speech so only the person with the scrambler can understand it. Similar devices are available for FAX machines and computers. Cost is \$300 and it's portable.

- **Letter bomb visualizer:** This spray product makes the contents of letters visible, then evaporates within seconds without a trace. Cost is \$25.

- **Bug vibes:** This unit fits in your pocket and vibrates when it electronically detects listening bugs in the area. Cost is \$950.

- **Miracle T-shirt:** Light enough to be worn under any garment, it can stop a bullet from a .357 magnum handgun. Cost is \$550.



Other items include a stun gun (\$50), tape recorder detector (\$4,000) and a variety of listening and microphone detection devices. There's also Cat's Eye, which attaches to your camera so you can see in the dark, not to mention an anti-kidnaping unit which can be hidden in a small piece of jewelry or a watch that when set off provides a homing

signal for rescuers.

SOUNDS PRETTY exotic. Actually, Sklar said, the devices are becoming routine business tools. While some of his clients are government agencies and foreign firms, the growing market is average businesses and even individuals.

"The bulk of what we do is sur-

veillance and counter-surveillance," Sklar said.

Consider this. Business nationally loses an estimated \$60-120 billion a year because of loss of productivity or worker compensation claims due to drug abuse on the job.

A worker slips into a bathroom and does a line of cocaine. Eventually, his ability to function is

gone and the company must pay to rehabilitate him or pick up the pieces of the mess he left after he left. Or worse yet, the company may end up with a dealer on the premise.

One way to cut the problem short is to catch the user in action. One company, elited by Spytech, used a mini video camera in a smoke detector. Every time the

door opened, the recorder silently activated and documented the identities and activities of anyone entering the room.

As a result of the surveillance, 13 employees were suspended.

It's here that a moral and legal question arises. Does a company have the right to spy on employees in the bathroom?

SURVEILLANCE laws vary from state to state. Further distinction is made between visual and audio surveillance. Complicating matters, the federal government has its own guidelines.

Most states allow recording conversations if just one of the parties is aware that a recording is being made. But since that person usually is the one with the recorder, the law is viewed often as so much paper.

The American Civil Liberties Union is livid. It charges that spy devices are being used to entrap estranged spouses, business partners who have had a falling out, and anyone someone else doesn't like.

Sklar takes a somewhat non-committal attitude, as if to say let the legal cards fall where they may. But he and his staff note the positive side of spying.

Spytech vice president Ed Sage recalls the celebrated nationally televised case of the baby sitter who beat an infant left in her charge that was recorded on a hidden video camera left by the child's parents.

Thanks to spying, the child was spared abuse and the abuser was apprehended.

Spying, in fact, occurs everywhere. Speed down a highway and it's likely the state police are watching with radar. Go to the mall. TV cameras monitor parking lots and those curious gates at many store entrances are "theft busters" that sound when merchandise is taken illegally from stores.

BIG BROTHER is watching — albeit with good intentions.

While the spy-privacy argument rages, Spytech's business just keeps getting better.

"Business is growing by leaps and bounds," said Sklar.

And if you're wondering where Spytech gets the ideas for many of its gadgets... they come from clients.

Got your own idea or interested in doing some surveillance? Spytech can be reached at (212) 268-4568. Oh, by the way, Spytech has some pretty nice offices — the 80th floor of the Empire State Building on illustrious Fifth Avenue in the Big Apple.

Weir's direction in 'Poets Society' will get him the Academy Award

By Dan Greenberg
special writer

The best director helms the best picture, right? If that's true then the Academy should have nominated a number of pictures and their directors in those two categories.

Well, that's exactly what happened with the directors of three

films nominated as best picture receiving the Academy nod — Oliver Stone ("Born on the Fourth of July"), Peter Weir ("Dead Poets Society") and Jim Sheridan ("My Left Foot").

The remaining two best director nominees, Woody Allen for "Crimes and Misdemeanors" and Kenneth Branagh for "Henry V," were justifiably disappointed not

to receive best picture nominations as well.

The Oscar process is a shadowy one. This year's nominations were unusual and unexpected, much like the Academy's voting process. Even from the relative comfort of my prognosticator's chair, it's hard to second-guess this best director category.

Oliver Stone's work helming "Born on the Fourth of July" is both searing and sensational, drawing out Tom Cruise's magnificent rendering of the tortured agony of a crippled, gung-ho Vietnam vet, Ron Kovic.

Despite the excellent direction and fine performances, the political value of Vietnam films passed with Stone's previous Oscar-winner, "Platoon," so "Born on the Fourth" is not in the envelope. Kenneth Branagh's "Henry V" is another fine film that runs contrary to Oscar's interest in popular success. The Academy looks to the box office and "Henry V" isn't turning out quite as popular and broad-based as Branagh intended.

DESPITE EXCELLENT story telling, "Henry V" viewers still need the kind of historical understanding devotees of Shakespearean theater bring to performances. Lacking that historical knowledge, plus having to deal with British dialect, reciting Shakespearean language takes this one out of popular, Oscar contention.

Jim Sheridan's work directing "My Left Foot" and that film's celebration of human courage and spirit has a lot going for it but, again, it tends to reflect many of the same "art-house" values that are working against a box office for either it or "Henry V." It is rather surprising that these two were even nominated. But then it's an unusual year.

Brenda Fricker plays the mother of writer Christy Brown,

who has Cerebral Palsy. She was nominated as best supporting actress. My rejection of her there rested on the fact that she changed not at all over 20 years of poverty, abuse and childbearing. The defect, the lack of realism in such a rendition, must be laid at director Sheridan's doorstep, so scratch another one.

Personally, my choice is Woody Allen for "Crimes and Misdemeanors" but he falls in the Academy's suspect crowd. He won't show up in a tux or, for that matter, at all. Same reason "Roger and Me" didn't get nominated — the Academy doesn't want Michael Moore in his baseball cap beating up on the sponsors.

BRANDO IS okay now because he's run out of Indian princesses. Vanessa Redgrave is still a no-no because she'd deliver a pro-PLO acceptance speech.

The bottom line is that the Academy wants an upbeat, high-concept, family show to celebrate the industry. No politics and no anti-establishment behavior.

If Woody Allen would stop spending Oscar night in a New York jazz joint, he might have a chance. There is hope, however, because Allen didn't mention his mother once in "Crimes and Misdemeanors."

Peter Weir's direction of "Dead Poets Society" has all the winning ingredients — multi-million dollar box office, a warm, personal story about youth and individuality versus the establishment and Robin Williams in an unusual, bravura performance.

All-in-all, a touching, memorable film with finely etched characters and rigorous pacing. Directors are blamed when those factors are missing or poorly done.

Peter Weir is best director for having seen to it that all these elements were so well done in the "Dead Poets Society."

Woody Allen is in the running for an Oscar for best director with his film, "Crimes and Misdemeanors."



Peter Weir won his best director nomination from the Academy for his work on "Dead Poets Society."



Oliver Stone brought the life of paralyzed Vietnam vet Ron Kovic to the screen in "Born on the Fourth of July," work that won him an Oscar nomination.