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News-Journal.com

Smart Bugs give fans an ear for the game
Device connects people in the stands with the home team

By [MIKE ELSWICK](#)

Sunday, September 16, 2007

Enhancing the experience of being in the stands for sporting events is one target of a relatively new product called Smart Bug.

"With Smart Bug, fans get information about what's going on in the game they're watching they would not get anywhere else," said Charles Chitwood, vice president of sales and marketing for the Southlake-based company. Chitwood, longtime East Texas sports writer and broadcaster from Jefferson, said the low-frequency listening device serves much like a customized radio focused on the event the person is attending.

Kerry Fortune of Abilene, a parent of East Texas Baptist University football player Thad Fortune, said he has used the device at home and away games for the Tigers.

"It allows you to listen to your team's broadcast team who know the players and their past experience," Fortune said. "I'd never heard of it before coming over to East Texas, but it's a really unique experience and adds to the game."

Fortune said the quality of the reception has been good. He likes the ability to get statistics by listening during halftime and also of being able to hear what the scores are of other conference games going on.

Chitwood said from high school and college football games to figure skating and horse show events, the possibilities for Smart Bug are endless.

"This has the potential to revolutionize the sports viewing experience," he said. "This is the neatest thing I've seen in my 16-year broadcast career."

With the Smart Bug, fans in the stand can listen to play-by-play coverage of the event they are watching with a radio signal transmitted on site from the press box in the stadium or arena, Chitwood said.

For the fan, the Smart Bug devices are small, battery-operated radios with an earphone they can turn on a few minutes before game time and use throughout the contest to have a better feel for what's going on, Chitwood said.

Among those fans who regularly use Smart Bug is Sharon Hall, who serves as secretary for the athletic department at East Texas Baptist University in Marshall. She has used the devices at ETBU games and at Marshall Mavericks football games.

"As game day administrator (at ETBU), I very rarely get to watch a complete series of downs," Hall said. "The Smart Bug allows me to be in all of the places I need to be and still know what's going on in the game."

Part of her game day duties include being in the fieldhouse preparing halftime snacks for the team and food for officials. Hall said the device also allows her to get statistics not provided by the public announcer.

"I never miss what's going on with the Smart Bug," she said.

The devices have been used at the Aztec Bowl in Mexico, at East Texas high school and college football, baseball and basketball games and at International Skating Federation competition.

For regional football coverage, Smart Bug sells a sponsorship package in which the sponsors get 250 of the devices to be given out for use throughout a season and advertising stickers placed on the devices along with mention during localized broadcasts of sporting events.

"We cater the ads to the local audience," Chitwood said.

"For fans who may not be familiar with a particular type of competition, like figure skating, the Smart Bug can help them understand better what's going on," he said.

Chitwood said the firm has inked a contract with the Manchester Monarchs hockey team in New Hampshire and hopes to seal other deals

with similar professional teams in the future.

"The American Quarter Horse Association has used the Smart Bug — they rent the devices out at \$50 a pop for a weekend competition," he said. "Use at about any sporting event is possible along with political and church conventions."

The Smart Bug comes with two channels so that it is possible for teams on opposing sides to be tuned into broadcasts customized from their point of view while listeners with the other team gets their side, he said.

Chitwood said sponsorship packages, which include 250 Smart Bug devices to be given out, run \$1,115. On the transmission end, he said there is a one-time cost of about \$850, which includes the transmitter and connections.

"The reception is good for about a 1/2-mile radius maximum," he said. Even in arenas with lots of concrete and steel, reception has been remarkably clear, Chitwood said.

This fall, Smart Bugs are being used at Jefferson, Hughes Springs and East Texas Baptist University football games. Other uses have included the 2006 Cotton Bowl, at Promise Keepers revivals, the National Cutting Horse Association Super Stakes in Fort Worth, the Long Beach, Calif., Aquatics Festival and at professional bull riding events in Grand Rapids, Mich., Las Vegas and other locations, he said.

"So far, everywhere they've been use, folks have raved about them," Chitwood said.

At a glance

- What: A low-frequency radio receiver that allows the listener to hear a broadcast customized to the event the listener is attending.
- Why: To provide the attendee with customized audio detail of an event and enhance the viewing experience.
- Where: Used at sporting events, conventions, meetings.
- Contact: Charles Chitwood, vice president, sales and marketing, (903) 240-1599; for more information go to www.smartbug.com.

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