High IQ the link for mine safety

With Australia's mining boom continuing unabated, a Wollongong-based multimedia company is playing a key role in ensuring the safety of people working at mines around the country and overseas.

iQmultimedia Director Mario Scanu and Business Development Coordinator Samantha Scanu with one of the company's information kiosks

iQmultimedia has developed a document management system that mine workers can access at easy-to-use kiosks at mine sites. The system, called IQ Link, is ideal for workers to check the most up-to-date safety information and updates on possible hazards or other safety issues at the beginning of their shift.

The company has already supplied close to 250 kiosks to around 150 mine sites across the country, and is building an international customer base with the technology installed at mines in South Africa and New Mexico in the United States. Clients include BHP Billiton Illawarra Coal, Rio Tinto and Peabody Coal.

"IQ LINK is all about safety and saving time," says iQmultimedia Director Mario Scanu. "It is simple and easy to use. Workers can access the documents they need by touching an icon on the screen, which then searches for the latest document on that topic. The documents can be watermarked and bar-coded to make sure only the latest information is available."

Depending on the requirements for the site, the workers can either read the document on the screen or print it out to take with them. Function options include a requirement for workers to acknowledge that they have read and understood a safety message before they enter the work site. Mr Scanu says the technology can be used like a daily on-site induction.

"Mine workers find the kiosks easy to use and can see the value," Mr Scanu said. "We've found that wherever IQ LINK has been trialled, the workers have demanded that it be installed because of the obvious safety benefits.

"The mining companies like it too, because it is a much more effective and efficient way of ensuring their workers are constantly kept up to date on all safety issues than by holding safety briefings and distributing documents. One company estimated that the technology is saving it $700,000 in lost time and productivity."

IQ LINK has been adapted for other industries, such as firefighting, hazard materials handling and construction. And while safety is the major application, the technology can also be used to deliver the latest documents for any purpose. For example, construction companies can use it to make sure contractors can only access the latest building plans.

The IQ LINK development team has also come up with other applications, including a visitors module that keeps track of visitors to a site including printing off custom labels with each visitor's photograph.

iQmultimedia has developed both the software and the hardware (kiosks) for IQ LINK.

The company grew from FM Scanu Engineering, which was established at Port Kembla in 1980 and traditionally provided machine shop engineering services for the region's mining and steel industries. Over the years the company broadened its activities to include electronics engineering including developing the hardware for electronic kiosks for the clubs industry to use for poker machine loyalty programs.

Establishing a software development arm was a logical progression, and iQmultimedia was formed to handle the electronic software and hardware sides of the business, as well as providing graphic design, web design and other software development services.

iQmultimedia employs mainly computer science professionals and graphic/web designers, and has grown from four to 20 staff in 12 months. To accommodate the expanding workforce, it recently moved to larger premises in the Wollongong CBD, with assistance from the State Government through NSW Trade & Investment. They also assisted the company to exhibit the IQ LINK technology at the 2011 NSW Minerals Council's Occupational Health and Safety Conference in the Hunter Valley.

Mr Scanu says Wollongong is an ideal location for the company. "This is a great place for the company to be based. Our staff love living and working in Wollongong so we have a stable workforce, and we have no shortage of high-end applicants for our senior positions," he said. "Our senior developers would all prefer to work in Wollongong than in Sydney, so as long as your pay and facilities are competitive you can attract top staff.

"We recruit most of our staff from the University of Wollongong, and they get great training there for the kind of work we do."