

San Antonio Brothers Develop DIGIKIDS to help find Missing Children

JENTRY AND BRENT POSS make a CD-ROM, an emergency response program, that could mean the difference between life and death for a missing child.

DIGIKIDS is a franchise that produces hand-sized CD-ROMs containing a child's picture and vital information. These identification elements are fused together with a series of prompts for frantic parents to follow if they have lost their child. So, for instance, if your search for your child has exhausted Wal-Mart employees and lasted long enough to make you uncomfortable, you can find a nearby PC, slip the portable disk in, and have pictures ready to print and distribute as prompted in the program.

"Your first few hours are the most vital during a missing child case, because he's most likely still in the area," says Brent Poss, co-owner of the local DIGIKIDS franchise. "Being able to be prepared immediately is a big asset. You need every second. Finding pictures, scanning them, getting them distributed takes time." With the DIGIKIDS software, all of this is already mobilized and ready for dispersal.

Aside from ready-made posters and pictures for law officials and civilians to help locate your missing child, there are clear, step-by-step lines for a frazzled parent to follow. After you click the big glaring "EMERGENCY" button at the top of the page, you are guided through the process of calling police, sending emergency e-mails to local officials, identifying where your child was last seen, what they were wearing, etc., and even identifying possible abductors, as may be possible in sticky custody situations.

The DIGIKIDS program has received support from Kate Cole at the Heidi Search Center, who said it is one of the few programs she would actually pay for to safeguard her children. There are a few things that could be improved, however: don't forget to go through a couple of dry runs with the program right away, as the various pages can be a bit to handle right off the bat. Second, don't waste time trying to stick the CD in a MAC during an emergency - it's designed to work with a PC.

Brent and Jentry do the bulk of their CDs in a central location, like schools. They use a digital camera and laptop to take a child's picture, then upload that picture and some provided information into the CD. No record of the child or his information is kept on the Poss' computer or camera; it is deleted immediately, so parents don't have to worry about someone else having their child's information.

If you upgraded that VCR to a DVD player, your stereo to a multi-deck CD system, and your cable to fiber optics because they're better, then it's time to replace that plastic child identification card with something that could actually help you maximize your time if your most prized treasure of all goes missing. ■

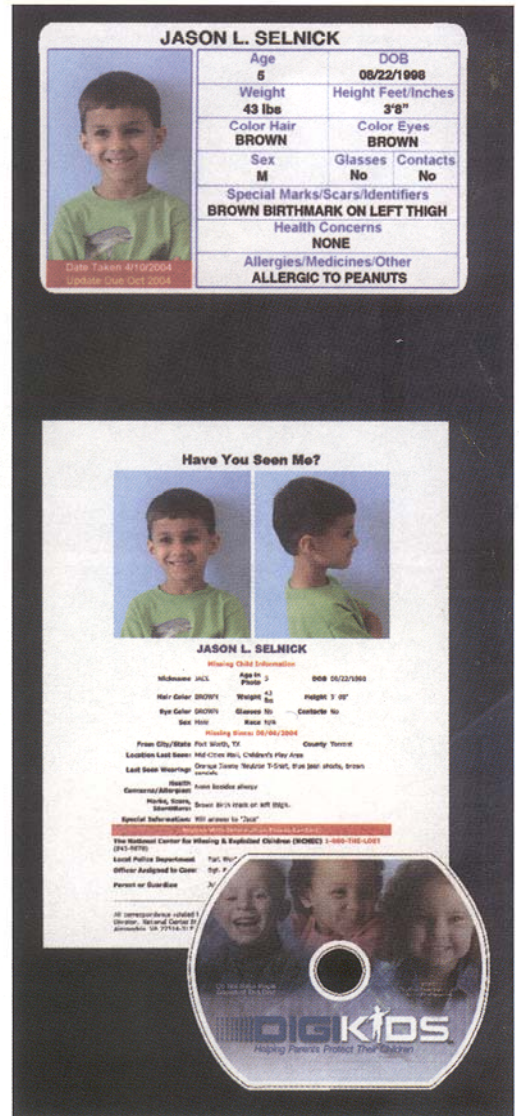


Illustration Courtesy of DIGIKIDS.