The truth about fraud

BUSINESS is booming for forensic polygraph examiner Steve Van Aperen.

The former detective's quest for the truth has enabled him to capture a slice of the burgeoning market in corporate fraud investigation.

He is deluged with requests from companies desperate to expose dishonest employees using lie detector tests.

"The corporate investigations are the biggest," he said.

"In the last six months we’re starting to get sexual harassment cases because the allegations are often uncorroborated."

Mr Van Aperen said his stable of high-profile clients was growing at a rapid rate, feeding a turnover of $240,000 for his company Australia Polygraph Services.

Internal theft, fraud and professional misconduct are the most prevalent areas of investigation.

The Institute of Criminology has estimated that internal theft and fraud is costing corporate Australia between $6.7 billion and $13 billion a year.

"There is a big problem across the board, growing because of a lack of internal controls at senior levels," Mr Van Aperen said.

"We save the companies huge amounts of money."

"The people we’ve tested in corporations have not only made admissions but they’ve implicated other people."

Suspects are wired up to "the machine", believed to be the first digital polygraph computer in Australia, which records and analyses changes in blood pressure, respiratory patterns and heart rate.

Mr Van Aperen also uses a technique that picks up deception by analysing people's responses to carefully crafted questions.

He was first introduced to the device in 1993 and trained with the US FBI and Secret Service in 1996.

"I’ve seen it used to assist investigations of child abduction," he said.

"That’s where it attracted my interest."

But Mr Van Aperen’s attempts to capture the interest of the Victoria and New South Wales police forces have been futile.

He said a lack of understanding and education about polygraph testing had hampered its growth.

But he is confident it will soon become an invaluable investigative tool.

"My belief is within the next three to five years every police department will be using it," he said.

Although the results are not admissible in court, the West Australian Macro task force investigating a Perth serial killer relied on the polygraph to narrow their field of inquiry a year ago.

And Queensland police have also embraced the technology on a trial basis.

"It’s lack of education and understanding about the framework and how it operates that has held it back," Mr Van Aperen said.

He recently introduced a new division, Omega Consulting Services, which specialises in fingerprinting, document examination and surveillance. And athlete drug-testing is next on the agenda as the Sydney 2000 Olympics approaches.