Reducing the Demand for Contraband Cell Phones in Correctional Facilities

A White Paper

Introduction

This document has been prepared by meshIP®, LLC to provide insight on a unique, secure, prison cell phone solution for use within correctional facilities throughout the United States. The purpose of the program is to provide cellular devices to detainees while offering robust control capabilities to the facility over how and when these devices are used. The ongoing benefits of this solution to the corrections facility include a significant reduction in the use of illegal cell phones within the facility, as well as a monthly revenue stream through commissions on the sale of airtime minute packages.

Abstract

Currently, detainees in prisons and jails are allowed to make personal calls through custom on-premise and VoIP Hosted PBXs. Calls made over the prison wall phone systems are frequently monitored and all calls are recorded, both for investigative purposes. A portion of the revenue associated with these calls flows to the prisons and, as such, is a source of operating funds. The problem with this current approach to prisoner calls includes the limited number of phones available to make calls - thus preventing the detainees from making all desired calls, the lack of privacy inherent in conducting the calls in a public area of the facility, as well as the need to wait in long lines to make calls.

These issues also impact the prison by significantly reducing the potential pay phone revenue earned. Increasingly, cell phones are smuggled into prisons further reducing the earnings from pre-pay and pay phone calling. As a result of these trends, correctional facilities are seeking a way of co-opting, controlling and even benefiting from the use of cell phones in the facility. meshIP®, LLC thru its meshDETECT® service offering, and in exclusive partnership with Cellhire®, a global cell phone company, has developed a custom solution to address these needs.

Problem Statement

The smuggling and illegal use of contraband cell phones in prisons in the United States has corrections administrators and officers at a disadvantage as wireless detection technologies have not kept pace with the surge in illegal cell phones in prisons. It is estimated that over 10,000 illegal cell phones were seized during 2010 in California state prisons alone.[1]

Many technology and control strategies have been proposed to manage this very complex problem, but those currently in use at prisons come at a very high cost with limited success.[2] Signal jamming technologies are proving to be too expensive, [3] and the time and cost demands on prison staff attempting to prevent cell phone smuggling are growing rapidly at a time when state and local prison budgets are shrinking.

While some of these contraband cell phones are used to plan and direct criminal activity, the vast majority are used by detainees to keep in contact with loved ones.[4] Many prisons have focused on preventing the supply of cell phones, but contraband cell phones in prison are a problem of both supply AND demand. Now with meshDETECT®, correctional facilities can reduce the demand for - and therefore the contraband value of - smuggled cell phones in jail.

Proposed Solution

It has been demonstrated that in-cell access to telephone service has a significant impact on prisoner behavior and significantly reduces contraband cell phone smuggling as evidenced by the results of a trial that involved installing wall phones in the cells at a prison in Britain:

"The introduction of in-cell telephony at Lowdham Grange, a prison in Nottingham, was followed by significant improvements in prison security, including a marked reduction in attempts to smuggle mobile phones into the establishment," says Vicky O'Dea, prisons operations director. "The number of prisoners failing random mandatory drug tests also fell following the introduction of the scheme."

She says the phones have made the prison safer. "Prisoner safety improved – there were fewer assaults, less bullying and fewer incidents of self-harm. Prisoners could make phone calls in more decent conditions, and the frequency and quality of contact with their families increased. Maintaining family contact is a proven factor in reducing the likelihood that prisoners will reoffend; consequently, introducing the phones led to an improvement in rehabilitation."[5] While we believe this approach to in-cell communications is correct, why incur the cost of wiring land-line phones into every cell in a correctional facility when you can accomplish the same results, at no cost, using a secure prison cell phone solution?

Given the public interest in fostering prisoners' communication and the personal demand for it, spending for prisoner communication services is remarkably low. Based on Prison Legal News' recent survey of U.S. state prison phone contacts, prisoners and their families spent

on average $24 per month on communication services in 2008.[6]   All U.S. households in that year averaged $149 per month on wire-line phone, wireless phone, and Internet access services.[7] The prison phone spending figure and the household communication spending figure differ in many ways. The comparison, however, highlights that $24 a month is a relatively small amount to be spending on communication. That's particularly true given the high public and personal value of communication with prisoners.

The meshDETECT® solution is designed to allow a prison inmate, using a highly secure cell phone, to make calls through the centrally-hosted meshDETECT® platform, and only to a specific list of preapproved telephone numbers. Additionally, if permitted by the correctional facility, the list of preapproved numbers that can be called by the detainees are also allowed to call into the secure cell phone when first routed through the centrally-hosted meshDETECT® service.

The cell phone is locked down to only allow calls to and from a single number – a unique telephone number controlled on the meshDETECT® platform. The secure cell phones have no internet access, working cameras or other prisoner accessible applications such as Facebook and Twitter. The timeframe that calls can be made is selectable and flexible with strict control features. Each call then deducts per-minute charges from a prepaid account for that meshDETECT® secure cell phone.

All calls will be recorded and can be searched for and listened to via a web interface. Any call in progress is able to be listened to in real time from a listening extension. There are three modes of monitoring: silent listen, mentor/control, and barge-in. If desired, voice mail for inbound calls can be enabled at an additional per minute service fee. All voice mails are recorded, stored, and can be reviewed. These voice mails can be deleted from the detainee's voice mailbox, and but are permanently archived for official review.

All cell phones and the meshDETECT® platform are configured for security to prevent unauthorized calling, tampering or hacking. The cell phones themselves have distinctive clear faceplates to distinguish them from contraband cell phones and to prevent hiding of other contraband in the cell phones themselves. If desired, custom GPS tracking software can be loaded on the phones to allow prison authorities to track the movement and location of the prisoner. This can be useful for those detainees in a work release program.

There is no special wireless infrastructure required to deploy the meshDETECT® secure cell phone solution. Every cell phone comes fully configured and ready for immediate deployment. Best of all, there are no upfront or ongoing costs to the correctional facility.

Future Direction

As correctional facilities introduce new services such as email and MP3 players into their facilities, they are faced with the challenge of managing multiple vendors and devices. Frequently, access to email or additional MP3 content requires giving prisoners access to a centrally located POD kiosk. The delivery of such media services in this manner is inefficient.

Infrastructure expense to provide wired connectivity to large, remote facilities with limited and restrictive electrical and data connectivity drive costs up. This approach also requires prisoner movement as well as the management of prisoner queues at the kiosk.

Prisons and jails need a future proof solution that takes into account current investment in a secure cell phone service and allows for the rapid, cost effective and simple deployment of additional services. Using our secure cell phones to wirelessly access secure email or MP3 media is operationally much more efficient and cost effective by not requiring expensive kiosks, additional devices or prisoner movement to access permitted services.

Conclusion

The first reaction to a seemingly uncontrollable situation is often an extreme or complicated approach. In the case of contraband prison cell phones, it appears easiest to simply jam signals and keep searching for smuggled cell phones.

The success of this approach is limited at best, and the ongoing expense and complexity of managing, administering, and upgrading systems introduces one thing that no one wants - more expense. Co-opt the legitimate detainee desire for more communication with family and loved ones that drives the majority of the demand for contraband cell phones.

When meshDETECT® was developed as a secure prison cell phone deployment and management system, every aspect of the perfect 'wish list' of providing better, safer, and more flexible communications to prisoners was taken into account.

The resulting solution now brings controlled communications and enhanced revenue opportunities to existing environments, and new revenue opportunities including work release programs to a wider range of constituents and customers.

What was once contraband is now viewed as a controlled asset with meshDETECT®. New strategies are now possible with leading edge controls and simplified accounting automation.

Contraband cell phones in prison are a problem of both supply and demand. Traditionally, prisons have focused only on preventing the supply of cell phones. Now with meshDETECT®, you can reduce the demand for - and therefore the contraband value of - smuggled cell phones in jail.

Deploying the meshDETECT® secure cell phone solution will offer your facility the following benefits:

- ✓ *Creates a safer environment*
    - o Sanctioned cell phones reduce black market value of smuggled cell phones
    - o Reduce prisoner movement though fewer trips to wall phones
    - o Each phone can be given ability to dial a tip line
- ✓ *Serious contraband reduction*
    - o Controlled yet expanded access to telephony service will reduce the need to smuggle in phones
- ✓ *Quality of life improvement*
    - o More private conversations & inbound calls from loved ones (optional feature)
- ✓ *Behavior control value*
    - o Cell phone access can be used to reward good behavior
- ✓ *Public service and safety improved*
    - o Work release prisoners can be tracked via a custom GPS program
    - o Work release prisoners can contact the prison if they have transportation problems
- ✓ *Forensic capabilities*
    - o Monitor, record and control all cell phone calls
- ✓ *Reduce Recidivism*
    - o Increased frequency and quality of communications with family

A key benefit to the prisons deploying this new solution is that each call made is a source of new revenue, similar to the commission revenue currently earned through the traditional prison payphone service offered in most facilities. More information is available at www.meshDETECT.com

About Us

meshIP®, LLC

Established in 2005, meshIP, LLC architects, delivers, and manages an on demand, or consumable, hardware and software infrastructure that guarantees either your technology staff can operate at the highest levels of effectiveness, or you are able to get out of the technology and telephone business once and for all. You merely explain your expectations to us and we mix and match resources into a strategy that accounts for where you are today and where you should be operating to be the most competitive.

An early pioneer in the emerging hosted applications, VoIP solutions, and cloud computing service markets, meshIP is able to provide robust, customized technology solutions that meet both complex and unique application requirements.

meshIP, LLC is the developer of meshDETECT®, a customized, proprietary, hosted software specifically designed for the unique security and investigative needs of corrections facilities interested in providing controlled cell phone services to detainees. This software limits and monitors the cell phone use to insure the calls made are only allowed calls and that the cell phone cannot be used for purposes and calls other than those specifically allowed by the facility management.

Cellhire® USA

Established in 1987, Cellhire is a world leader in mobile communications providing clients with innovative and competitive wireless rental solutions. Cellhire is an independent company providing wireless services on various networks worldwide. Through the strength of global relationships and 24 Hour Global Support, Cellhire offers its customers a wide range of world-class rental solutions.

Cellhire is a well established, independent service provider. The company specializes in business to business and business to government relationships with a strong focus on providing tailored rental solutions for its end users.

Cellhire has a strong track record in providing customers with tailored solutions and believes that taking a unique approach with each customer is essential for fulfilling specific customer requirements. It is because of this approach that Cellhire is in the best position to meet the unique requirements of the Corrections market.

Cellhire is represented throughout the world with offices in the United States (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington DC, Seattle and Dallas) throughout the UK (London and York), throughout France (Paris and Cannes), Germany (Munich) and in Asia (Tokyo, China, and Seoul-partner).