

# Pagers, Digital Audio, and Kiosk: Officer Assistants

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## Introduction

Most officers will agree that the focus on offender contact field work has increased dramatically over the last decade. Officers need to spend their time and efforts on issue- and result-driven contacts. Officers must *triage* their efforts on the offenders who need immediate and multiple contacts to ensure public safety and compliance with court-ordered conditions and sanctions. Almost every district will indicate that officer "field time" has increased over the past five years. Officers are doing better jobs of planning and identifying issues to address at field contacts; nonetheless, increased field time does not always yield increased contact with the defendants/offenders or collateral sources. Officers still spend a great deal of time calling and driving to homes or work sites only to leave a card for the defendant/offender to call back. This equates to thousands of personnel hours, resources, and other support duties with great "issue-driven intentions" but no results. To be fair, many offenders/defendants also spend a lot of time leaving messages and wasting trips to the office only to find their officer unavailable.

Basic technology such as e-mail, fax, and answering machines have certainly increased communication and allowed transmittal of important information in an efficient manner. Those basic technologies are commonplace to businesses, but often not always readily available to offenders/defendants, especially the cases we need to see the most often. We must look at other available technologies that can facilitate contacts and field work without wasted efforts. The district of Utah implemented the use of digital dictation/transcription and traditional pagers as

time-saving programs and is currently developing a kiosk machine. These programs are an effort to allow greater flexibility of work hours and create more time for *face-to-face* field work.

## "Page me"

When looking for an employee who is not at their desk, we usually page or call a cell phone; we do not drive to their house or work site and hope they are there. Family members, children, and significant others carry pagers. Take a walk down the hall of any high school and it will appear that every other student has a pager. The reason for such popularity is that pagers are inexpensive and efficient. With the exception of a few isolated rural areas, a person can be contacted anywhere.

For the past three years, the district of Utah has found designated pagers to be an efficient way to contact offender/defendants without wasted trips, telephone calls, or other fruitless efforts. The pager is the property of the Probation and Pretrial Services Office and is assigned to the offender/defendant as a condition of supervision or pretrial release. Only the Probation and Pretrial Services Office knows the number, which keeps the defendant/offender from using the pager for personal calls. If the pager beeps, it is the officer with a directive. Offender/defendants are required to respond to the pager 24 hours a day, seven days per week.

Use of the pager can be designed by the individual supervision officer to meet the needs of each case. For example, if number "1" appears on the LED screen, it means call your officer immediately, "2" means come to the office within one hour, "3" means sub-

mit a urine sample within two hours, etc. The menu is only limited by the officer's imagination. Pagers have worked very well with offender/defendants who do not have or cannot afford telephones. Those defendants/offenders are most likely to cause an officer a great deal of fruitless effort to make contact. If paged, that offender/defendant can go to a public telephone or neighbor to contact the probation/pretrial office. Although the program works well in any area, it can be a great time and miles saver with rural caseloads.

Pagers have also served as an alternative or enhancement to traditional ankle-bracelet electronic monitoring. Current electronic monitoring can control and report a defendant/offender's movement at the home or base station. It does not assist the officer during the hours the defendant/offender is on work or other release from the transmitter station. The pager can contact the defendant/offender at any time and any place with directives from the officer. It is most often used as an enhanced sanction at administrative staffings or violation hearings for offenders/defendants who have demonstrated a need for more control.

Pagers are inexpensive and can be combined with offender/defendant co-pay or full pay as part of the special conditions, depending on local court policy and philosophy. The District of Utah originally leased the pagers for approximately \$4.00 per month. The Probation and Pretrial Services Office subsequently purchased pagers, pays a lower monthly service fee, and issues them directly to the offender/defendant as ordered by the Court. Cost for replacement of the pager if lost, broken, or stolen is approximately

\$60.00. At today's gas prices and other transportation-related costs, combined with the wasted hourly salaries for "no contact" efforts, the pagers appear to pay for themselves nearly instantly. Currently the offender/defendant signs an agreement to reimburse the cost of the pager if it is lost or stolen; but even in the few cases where the pager or money is not recovered, it is money well spent on the supervision mission. For any criminal supervision office, this technology can increase offender contact while decreasing the effort and time to successfully facilitate the contact, leaving more time for other issues and urgent field supervision activities.

## Digital Dictation and Transcription

We all know "if it's not documented, it didn't happen." In support of that theory, the District of Utah has installed a digital dictation system. These types of systems have been used by doctors and police agencies for years to transcribe information at the end of an event or shift from any location. It allows officers and staff to enter chronological case notations ("chronos") from any telephone at any time. The officer can spend a full day in the field, go directly to his/her home or any telephone and call in the information. Officers dial into the systems and then are prompted for a user identification number, a work type, and a subject identification number. The records are then transcribed by support staff (who also can be located anywhere) and entered into the computer system with less than a two day turnaround.

Since implementing the digital dictation system, the District of Utah has received many benefits. Any officer who has had to cover or respond to another officer's case knows the importance of being able to have the most current activity available before making contact with the defendant/offender. This necessity is met with digital dictation since support staff can transcribe from any field office or alternative location (i.e., work at home). This allows for guaranteed quick turnaround entry without delay due to support staff being on sick or annual leave. This type of system also allows managers to create alternative work sites and make better use of traditional office space. It further allows management more equitable options for work distribution without the limitations of geography and distance.

In Utah, the majority of presentence reports transcribed for officers in the Salt Lake

main office are completed by support staff in the satellite St. George office 305 miles away. Chronological records are transcribed by a clerk at a "work at home" alternative duty station. Digital dictation also creates the potential for part-time transcriptionist positions and other options for the maximum use of decentralized Court Personnel System funds.

Dictation transcribed from the digital system is entered and saved on the district computer network system with no greater delay than when working with support staff in the same building. There are no tapes to be transported, damaged, or lost. This system works for all written information stored by the Probation and Pretrial office. More importantly, it keeps officers in the field for investigations and offender/defendant management rather than behind a keyboard doing a clerical job at an officer's salary.

Active workload statistics can readily be extracted from the digital system to provide information on the amount of work to be transcribed or the amount completed. Turnaround time is easily computed for the information that is stored. Hourly work status graphs help evaluate and equalize work assignments for support staff.

## What is a Kiosk?

The District of Utah Probation and Pretrial Office is currently developing a plan to involve kiosk technology as an aid to supervision strategies. We project the first kiosk to be up and running by November of 2001. We are all familiar with these *interactive machines*. Although nothing can beat good face-to-face customer service, it is nice to be able to do banking at 6:00 a.m. or 10:00 p.m. It is convenient to walk into your favorite book or music store to see if the item you are seeking is available, without having to wait in line or find one of the few available clerks. Some people actually prefer asking for information and doing business with a machine rather than live interaction. These machines have made our precious time more flexible and adaptive to our needs.

With a kiosk, officers enroll an offender/defendant and capture their fingerprints digitally with scanners from Identix. A user identification number is created based upon the PACTS number, and the fingerprints become the password to the system. An e-mail account is also created. They will be entered—with case-specific information—into the database.

When defendants/offenders use the kiosk, a biometric sample is taken (via scanner) and compared to the one collected during enrollment. Once a match is established, the offender/defendant can interact with the kiosk by pressing buttons on the touch screen. Data is entered to verify address and employment status and to respond to questions defined by the probation officer. The probation officer may also send messages for a defendant/offender to be delivered the next time he/she checks in at a kiosk. The defendant/offender can read the mail message and respond electronically. Written instructions are given on screen. A digital photo of the face will be captured. When the session is done, a receipt is generated for the defendant/offender's records.

Utah plans to place the first kiosk in the lobby of the current federal Community Corrections Center (CCC). This will provide line of sight supervision by CCC staff to avoid vandalism and abuse. The future may hold unlimited placement options such as police stations, malls, or any business willing to host or lease space. It will further facilitate convenient interaction and use by offenders/defendants reporting to CCC for drug testing or other court-ordered functions.

## What the Kiosk Can Do

The kiosk permits us to expand but not replace our role as officers while providing alternative service solutions. It frees the officer's time for field supervision as it automates tasks such as mandatory in-office reporting and Monthly Supervision Report (MSR) collection. It can increase defendant/offender accountability while decreasing routine officer tasks. Our district feels there are numerous applications to *enhance* defendant/offender contacts within the scope of supervision. These applications are not designed to *replace* defendant/offender contact; the kiosk is a support tool for *enhancing* the supervision officer's role, not a *robot* supervising offenders/defendants.

Defendants/offenders can receive specific information from their probation/pretrial services officers that is confirmed by picture and fingerprint identification. With a PIN or ID number defendants/offenders can receive specific reporting instructions (when, where, what to bring) from their officer. As with the pager, this type of system would work very well with defendants/offenders who do not have a telephone. Currently for those with telephones, there is "plausible denial" with

answering machines and leaving messages with collateral sources. Offenders can claim the answering machine is broken or was erased, or the person answering the phone never gave them the message. With the kiosk, the probation/pretrial services office can assure the information was available, correct, and in working order and received by only the defendant/offender. The responsibility of getting the information is transferred to the defendant/offender rather than being on the officer. Most would agree that placing more responsibility on defendants/offenders to meet their obligations is a *desired outcome* of supervision.

With the kiosk's ability to transmit information, unlimited assistance can be given to defendants/offenders. The information can be specific to the defendant/offender for his/her eyes only via fingerprint access, or could be general information that all users can view. Bus routes to and from the courthouse, local job service, counseling centers, etc. can be accessed by the touch of a screen. Counseling and treatment schedules can be available with all current changes. Job opportunities with where and how to apply could be entered and updated from the main office. Again, the information to be transmitted to the defendant/offender is only limited by the officer's or district's imagination.

The kiosk would also be useful for agencies that track mandatory felony reporting. Often felons on travel status are required to go to a police station, wait in line, and then present identification to an officer/staff member to meet the requirement. The felon is then allowed to leave with no other instructions. The kiosk, with fingerprint verification and prompted questions, could streamline this procedure and, more importantly, could have the information immediately entered and transmitted to police, probation, and pretrial services agencies.

The kiosk is also a two-way street. Defendants/offenders can provide and transmit information to probation and pretrial services officers. MSRs, lists of places the defendant/offender applied for work, address changes, lease agreements, etc., could all be transmitted to the appropriate officer immediately. Although answering machines can do some of this now, the kiosk provides more specific information in printed format. The officers could receive the information the next working day to verify activities and to facilitate the planning of their field work. It could also speed up the required PACTS entries for address changes. Depending on placement of the

machines, it could prevent defendants/offenders needing to take time off work to meet their obligations of probation and pretrial release. The last thing any officer wants is defendants missing work or losing a job over absenteeism when they are compliant in all other areas.

### *The Kiosk and Pretrial Supervision*

The kiosk is particularly useful in providing pretrial services officers with a reasonable assurance strategy for monitoring risk of non-appearance. Defendants on travel permit status can check-in upon return at anytime with visual verification. Defendants can be required to check in on weekends or during non-traditional hours, thus limiting the ability to engage in unauthorized travel for any significant distance. Judges and magistrates may become more confident with the ability to monitor defendant travel and order pretrial release on cases that may have been detained in the past. Furthermore, this *could* free up jail space and temporary housing for higher risk cases.

The kiosk will also serve as an additional amended strategy at violation hearings to diminish the risk of nonappearance. Here again, offering increased sanctions on violation cases could enable judges to keep marginal cases on supervision rather than in detention. This would save the often-scarce jail beds for those offenders posing a more serious risk of harm to the public.

The principal focus is to maintain contact with defendants who pose a manageable risk to the public and who require moderate personal supervision. If used in conjunction with personal face-to-face reporting, the defendant can come to the department office once per month, and report to a kiosk once per week for the rest of the month. Administrative or compliant caseloads of defendants who pose little or no risk to the public can report as needed to receive and transmit information. Again, this does not supervise our compliant caseloads with "robo cop" but rather enhances our contacts with that portion of our caseloads in an efficient and timely manner. The kiosk will increase contact and control of cases, not replace the officer's job. In the spirit of least restrictive pretrial supervision, the kiosk is considerably less restrictive than reporting to a courthouse or pretrial services office and offers more flexible hours.

### *System Components*

The kiosk is designed with durable metal construction cabinet and a powdercoat industrial

finish to protect against graffiti and vandalism. User interfaces consist of an Elo 17-inch touch-screen monitor, vandal-resistant keyboard, Identix biometric scanner, Practical Automation ATX 38 printer, Visioneer Strobe Pro scanner, and digital camera. Processing is done by a PIII 1Ghz CPU with Windows 2000 Professional. Kiosk systems are manufactured by several companies. Kiosk Information Systems was chosen to build the system for Utah. The kiosk structure is an ergonomic design to allow easy screen access. Attention was given to screen position and height to allow handicapped persons access and to be compliant with the 1992 Americans with Disabilities Act. An open-frame standard monitor was chosen over the new TFT flat screen displays. This choice was made because the Elo 17-inch screen gave better readability and was less costly. The system is connected to the kiosk server via a VPN connection. The kiosk server is a PIII 1Ghz CPU with Windows 2000 server and SQL 2000. An Identix biometric scanner is attached to be used for enrollment. Crystal Reports is used to produce standard management reports and specialized form generation.

### **Conclusion**

Using technology for officer assistance is not optional to remain a successful and competitive agency. Probation and pretrial services supervision will always require logical thinkers to make subjective decisions to achieve and fulfill the mission. Officers cannot be replaced by machines. The gadgets and machines listed above can assist and give us more time to complete the subjective and personal duties of jobs.

### **Endnotes:**

The following are web sites related to the technology in the article. The philosophical and mission-related applications of the technology are the opinion of management in the District of Utah Probation and Pretrial Office.

[www.identix.com](http://www.identix.com)  
[www.crystaldecisions.com](http://www.crystaldecisions.com)  
[www.fmakiosks.com](http://www.fmakiosks.com)  
[www.elotouch.com/partners](http://www.elotouch.com/partners)  
[www.kis-kiosk.com](http://www.kis-kiosk.com)  
[www.automon.com](http://www.automon.com)  
[www.visioneer.com](http://www.visioneer.com)  
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