

The voice of electronic monitors: Echopass tech tracks parolees

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By John Sailors

Proposition 83, which would require sex offenders to be electronically monitored for life, would spur the market for equipment and technology that keep tabs on parolees.

Pleasanton-based Echopass Corp. provides voice communications for a monitoring system that is already in demand. Set up by Salt Lake City-based SecureAlert, the system uses ankle bracelets that combine GPS and cellular technology to allow staff and parole officers to monitor and communicate with offenders. Echopass, which offers hosted contact center services, provides the telephony.

SecureAlert, a subsidiary of RemoteMDx Inc., began marketing its ankle bracelets in January and started shipping in July. Its president, Randy Olshen, said demand has been overwhelming.



The ankle bracelets are used by 125 municipalities, counties and state agencies in 35 states, with some 3,500 parolees now wearing them. The company expects that number to reach 20,000 by year-end, representing approximate annual revenue of \$58 million. Locally, the Oakland Police Department uses the system.

Echopass is "the backbone" of this voice system, said Olshen. Echopass integrates VoIP technology with CRM and other software for companies, including Kodak Imaging Network in Emeryville.

Echopass hosts SecureAlert's voice service at its data center, which also is in Salt Lake City. The company's chief marketing officer, Bruce Dresser, said Echopass' hosted service model fit the scalability needs of SecureAlert's sudden growth.

"They're growing by leaps and bounds," Dresser said. "You hate to think that society needs this, but the reality is that society does."

Echopass' Bruce Dresser said the monitoring system is growing rapidly.

Olshen said SecureAlert turned to an outside vendor partially to avoid the costly investment in expertise and hardware, and chose Echopass because it needed a partner that could handle the fast growth.

The growth is likely to continue. The total correctional population in the United States in 2004 was about 7 million, 4.9 million of which was living in the community on probation, according to figures from the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics. One out of every 31 adults, or 3.2 percent of the population, was in jail, or on parole or probation.

In addition, legislatures have been turning out laws requiring longer and stricter controls on offenders, and crowding in prisons is pressuring authorities to parole more offenders - all of which means more monitoring.

Handling the growth has become the main focus at SecureAlert. Company spokesman Christopher Anderson said the boom in electronic monitoring of offenders has been overwhelming, taking up most of the company's time.

Its other main product, a monitoring system for seniors and patients, has to some degree been set aside for a time.

Once a parolee is outfitted with a bracelet, the parole officer enters alert protocols into SecureAlert's database. Exclusion zones such as schools and nightlife areas can be specified. If a parolee enters those zones, the monitoring center gets an alert. Depending on the protocol, staff can contact the offender directly with a warning or notify the probation officer, and even patch the probation officer in for a three-way conference.

The monitoring center staff basically acts as an assistant to the agency, Olshen said.

Echopass Corp.

Business: Hosted contact center services

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