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CUSP Submission Re-Thinks Communications with Zello App [1]

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At the University of Colorado Denver, the Office of Laboratory Animal Resources (OLAR) found communications challenging given its many labs, large footprint, and primarily basement locations. The 70 staff members were using Verizon push-to-talk cell phones (PTT)/Blackberries and they struggled with a host of technical and other issues, including dropped calls; call quality degradation; inability to track devices; inability to limit personal additions to cell phones; high replacement costs; low security; and, incompatibility of equipment with current University operating systems.

So OLAR Director Jori Leszczynski teamed up with colleagues Carolyn Russell and Daniel Munoz to implement a new communications process that utilized iPods and iPhones in conjunction with Zello, a walkie-talkie app.

The iPod/iPhone touch enables high-quality, no-cost communication via reliable devices over the University wireless network instead of paying for cell service to use the Verizon version. Features provided by the iPod/iPhone can be used to limit staff access on the device to work email, the Zello app, and certain websites. Furthermore, communications can be encrypted. Apple's free Find My iPod/iPhone app helps track lost and stolen devices. Also - with the iPods, staff can access email from work stations directly by the animals rather than having to leave the facility to communicate.

The Zello app technology enables instant click-talk to a wider range of phones and devices in the facility, at a lower price, on any network throughout campus. Other Zello features (including secure authorization, digital signature, and a dedicated private network) allow OLAR – a secure facility – to communicate directly with an iPod in the campus police department.

In addition to improving communications and saving staff time and effort, the initiative has generated savings of approximately $8,000 – even with the initial purchase of hardware. Going forward, the team expects to see annual savings of $16,000. The team plans to continue to leverage the devices and technology to create future efficiencies and reduce paper use in the facility.

If you want to trigger some out-of-the-box thinking for your own department, a good starting place is the CUSP website. You'll find Jori's submission [3] -- and other innovative practices -- described there [4].

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