

PCS fills sensitive role in communication services

Inmate communication, monitoring improves in Doña Ana County

By **BETHANY CONWAY**
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In 2004, an internal affairs investigator in the Doña Ana County Detention Center cracked an unsolved murder in what would be a highly recognized case. Using a communication system provided by Public Communications Services (PCS), the officer was able to listen to a phone call through the PCS inmate telephone system and help solve a murder in Maricopa County, Ariz.

"We overheard a call from an inmate to his father about a murder in Doña Ana County," said Christopher Barela, director of the detention center. From there the detention center was able to share the information with the proper authorities in order to solve an important murder case.

Providing inmate communication in the Doña Ana County Detention Center since 2002, PCS fills a highly specialized niche in the communications market and is changing the way that inmates communicate with the outside world.

"PCS is a telecommunication company that focuses on the inmate communications industry," said Rudy Zaragoza, vice president of sales and marketing for PCS. "Our sole focus is to provide these services to cor-

rectional facilities."

While the system is an integral part of crime solving and prevention both inside and outside of detention centers, Zaragoza said it's also about providing inmates with a way to stay in touch with their families.

"We specialize in the provisioning of services so that inmates and their friends and family can communicate with each other," he said. "On the other side of that is the correction side of it, which is providing technology that will allow correctional investigators and officers to do investigations through our calling platform."

According to Zaragoza, studies have shown that when inmates get the opportunity to call and communicate more with their families they are less likely to end up back in the penal system.

"We introduced the concept of pre-paid into the inmate communications industry," he said. "There are two types. One is our typical Pre-Paid Daily Dial, and that is a service where friends and family can purchase a pre-paid phone card (for the inmate). The family can purchase a set amount of phone time and replenish the account and the phone call can only be made to the telephone number that it got set up for on the prepaid account.

"There is another prepaid service where an inmate can actually call multiple telephone numbers as allowed by the facility. The account is set up by the inmate, they purchase the prepaid phone time, and that is where our integration expertise comes into play."

Because PCS provides detailed records of phone calls and different options for those receiving an inmate phone call, Zaragoza said the system can be complicated.

"There is a lot of intelligence in the system that

will allow for well-monitored communication from a correctional facility," he said. "A lot of it is driven by technological advancement in terms of recording and archiving of calls."

Today other technologies are also being driven into the market place, which Zaragoza said is another stepping stone for his company.

"Inmate messaging or the equivalent to email is beginning to get attraction," he said. "In general, the correctional marketplace and the correctional facilities are very conservative, and rightly so because the things that people do on the outside, the bad things they do, they tend to carry internally as well when they are in jail. So a lot of the things that we enjoy today, we look at them and make sure it is the right fit for the situation."

An example of this is the company's service to Mexico. Because many inmates in Doña Ana County have family in Mexico, PCS recently added a phone service so that inmates can call there at a lower price.

While PCS fills a sensitive niche in the communications industry, both progress with inmates and with investigations through their inmate communication system shows that the system is working, Zaragoza said. As other communication companies such as MCI and Verizon have exited the corrections market, PCS has strengthened their role in the system to become one of three major players.

"We try to service the community and the friends and family of inmates. We try to look at them as consumers as opposed to family of inmates," he said. "You don't write or read about this industry, but there is an industry where service providers are actually providing this stuff, and PCS is one of them."