


360 JUSTICE



The 360 Justice Podcast is back with Season 2!

Season 2 Episode 2:

Empowering Justice: Andie Moss on PREA, Culture Change, and Leadership

Hosted by Steve Carter



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Featured Articles

Video Visitation: Evolving Revenue Streams

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As correctional facilities continue to deal with locked-down budgets, converting conventional, face-to-face visitation to remote, video visitation has emerged as a way to reduce operational costs.

The question of whether video visitation systems actually save money and reduce or eliminate contraband flows has been answered definitively in the field: Yes. Today, a related question is emerging among corrections professionals, "How can we find the capital to deploy a solution, and how quickly will it pay for itself?"



Value-Added

The conventional deployment of video visitation systems creates payback in three primary ways:

Andrea Knittel November 16,
2023

Partners and Associations



- Labor savings occur as a result of no longer having to escort inmates to and from housing units to the visitor area, and manage the public in the visitor area. Depending on a facility's policies, procedures and building design, this savings can be immediate and potentially significant.
- Labor and vehicle transportation savings occur as a result of no longer having to transport inmates to and from a facility for professional visits (e.g. courtroom arraignments, medical consultations, etc.)
- Savings also occur associated with a reduction in contraband flows and the increased safety and security of staff and inmates.

The efficiencies and cost savings noted above are widely accepted as avenues for achieving return on video visitation investment. A more subtle benefit, relates to the reduction in disruptive behavior of inmates and more positive public relations that accrue from providing the opportunity for additional visits.

Moving beyond the area of cost savings, as video visitation technology continues to evolve, there is a growing interest in utilizing the technology to generate revenue as well.

Progress often comes at the expense of great debate and experimentation.

There are currently multiple methodologies and philosophies on the revenue-generation side of the technology, not all of which are proven or provide advertised results in the field.



Revenue Stream

The most obvious way to generate revenue from video visitation is to charge for visits. Although there are some agencies that would like to charge for every visit, such a practice would violate visitation requirements in almost every jurisdiction.

However, if a jurisdiction is required to provide two visits per inmate per week, there is rarely any restriction on charging for additional visits. Fees for these visits, including a cancellation policy/penalty, vary greatly by jurisdiction, and may be set by a facility at its discretion.

Another methodology for generating revenue through visitation is perhaps best referred to as “the Convenience Factor,” which can be used in conjunction with the above-mentioned standard income generation model to further increase revenues.

A simple concept, under the convenience model, the agency can provide multiple visitor centers from which visitors can participate in the remote visitation. Visitors can choose the most convenient location from the list of alternative centers, and be charged a fee for the service and convenience.

Individuals can decide for themselves whether a “free” visit at the facility, where the inmate is housed, merits the potential expense, such as time off work, drive time, gas, hotel, etc., or pay for service delivery at a more convenient time and location. Simply stated, this model grants the public the power of choice.

A wide variety of properties are currently being discussed and operated as remote convenience visitor centers, including local law enforcement sub-stations, other jails and prisons in the region, and Salvation Army locations and churches in the community.

When considering what to charge for visits, the obvious goal is to arrive at an optimal amount, before returns begin to diminish. The benefit comes from creating a revenue stream from stations that may otherwise be sitting idle. In the case of “the Convenience

Factor” methodology, fees can typically be higher based on the potential for significant convenience.

In-Home Testing

There is talk in the industry of potentially providing the most convenient visitation methodology of all — remote visitation from the home. In many ways, conducting visits from the home can be seen as a natural, next step — that eliminates the public presence from correctional facilities and provides the ultimate in visitation convenience within the revenue generation model.

However, the risks involved and potential for litigation is too great for most jurisdictions to consider such a scenario. Furthermore, among other potential issues, current technology does not provide a solution for maintaining proper security.

The pitch-line is that all visits can be monitored, recorded, and immediately interrupted upon discovery of inappropriate behavior. While this sounds great, the reality is that most administrators do not have enough manpower (and agree that it would be a logistical impossibility) to monitor all live and recorded visits, and prevent unapproved visitors from swapping with approved visitors.

Another concern with at-home video visitation is that although visits can be monitored and shut down, there is no efficient or cost-effective way to listen to all visits. Experience tells the industry that inmates will quickly discover this and have an unapproved visitor standing just outside of camera range, carrying on a conversation while the person in front of the screen pretends to be talking.

Without question, visits from the home can help augment other remote visitation practices. However, currently this model is not practical for facilities that intend to conduct substantial numbers of visits.

Beyond the Visit

One of the more interesting and polarizing methodologies for utilizing video visitation to create additional revenue streams involves using dormant visitation stations as advertising billboards. The concept is simple: When a visitation station/kiosk is idle, an advertisement for a bail bondsman, lawyer or media products, to name but a few, can be displayed on the screen. Industry reaction has thus far been equally simple — the idea is either loved or hated.

Correctional facilities can also increase revenue from video visitation by creatively utilizing the inmate visitation scheduling system. Another simple concept — and this one performs as advertised: Responsibility for scheduling video visits can be transferred to the inmate and carried out from a scheduling interface on a kiosk.

Self-scheduling conserves labor, and reduces costs by eliminating staff involvement in the scheduling process and, more important, causes the inmate to pick up the phone or send an e-mail informing the visitor of the scheduled visitation.

While attitudes in corrections are as polarized by this practice as they are the notion of utilizing dormant stations as billboards, the ability of self-scheduling to increase revenues has been demonstrated in the field.

Clearly, video visitation is here to stay, and its value is greater than the sum of its parts. But exactly what that value is, how far the concept and technology can be pushed to generate revenue, remains unclear.

A video visitation system will pay for itself in labor, transportation and security savings — and it can be an excellent source of incremental revenue. However, at this time, the revenue captured for visits is in no way proven to offset the investment

associated with installation of the network, equipment and other related costs.

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