



E-Messaging Saves Time, Improves Security

*I*t's Saturday morning at the soccer field, and as the Colorado mother of the young player who scored the winning goal gives him a hug, she makes plans to hurry home to her computer and write a letter to his father about the game. A few months ago, she would have had to make a trip to the post office to mail the letter to her husband, incarcerated in a nearby correctional facility, and by the time the letter made its way through the postal system and the State's mailroom, the team would likely have already played next week's game. Now, thanks to an e-messaging mail system, the player's father will know about his son's accomplishment in less than 48 hours.

A number of States around the country, including Colorado, have recently added a form of electronic messaging to their correctional facility mailrooms. Electronic messaging allows inmate families to write letters 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and send them to their loved ones electronically for a small fee. The system's features provide mailroom staff with the necessary tools to quickly scan letters, print out those that qualify, and quickly deliver them to inmates.

"Our mailroom staff have to open and read every piece of hard copy mail and check it for contraband," says Tony Carochi, deputy director of prisons for Colorado. "Handwritten letters can be very difficult to read, and mailroom staff have to manually look for certain keywords or phrases. With electronic messaging, we put several hundred keywords that have been identified by Intel [Corporation] and security staff in a database, and the system reviews a letter in less than a minute. Using electronic messaging is a real timesaver."

Families and friends of an incarcerated person use the Internet to create an account, and purchase "e-stamps" to send their letters. The vendor's interface system sorts and routes letters to the appropriate facility daily. Colorado had to purchase printers and copiers for printing the letters, but obtained the service at no cost.

Because not everyone has access to a computer, Colorado's mailrooms still process a number of letters the "old-fashioned" way. The State introduced incoming electronic messaging in August 2006, and the next phase is for the introduction of kiosks that will allow inmates to send letters out through the system.

"We met with inmate advocacy groups before we introduced the pilot program and got their buy-in," Carochi says. "We've had nothing but positive feedback from the advocacy groups, mailroom staff, inmates, and their families and friends."

Colorado initiated this program as the result of an employee suggestion, and identified several vendors before selecting one for a 6-month pilot program. The success of the pilot program led to the system's statewide introduction.

For more information on Colorado's e-messaging program, contact Tony Carochi at 719-226-4725, or tony.carochi@doc.state.co.us.

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