

Are Businesses Crossing Lines by Tracking Employees?

Written by Ginny Grimsley
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Expert Cites Benefits & Ways to Ease Privacy Concerns

Nearly 10 years after real-time package- and people-tracking went viral with the advent of GPS-enabled cell phones, small businesses face two big concerns.

“One is expense. Small businesses, especially those still recovering from the worst recession in modern history, can’t always afford to provide their employees with GPS-equipped smart phones,” notes location-based services specialist George Karonis, founder and CEO of LiveViewGPS, Inc., provider of Mobile Phone Locate tracking service, (www.mobilephonelocate.com).

“The second issue is privacy. People generally don’t want their employer to be a ‘big brother’ boss who can track their every move. It’s not because they’re doing something they shouldn’t, but because it invades their space, and the information could be misinterpreted or misused.”

But employee tracking has plenty of obvious benefits to small business owners:

- Provide baseline information. It gives businesses solid data to analyze for initiatives such as improving efficiency. Businesses with lots of workers in the field making deliveries or service calls can optimize routes and schedules.

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- Improve customer service and satisfaction. Tracking helps a business tell people waiting somewhere for a delivery or service exactly where their package or service-person is and how long the wait will be.
- Improve response times. On-site coordinators can re-route workers in the field to respond to unscheduled calls in the most efficient way possible.
- Reduce costs. The greater efficiency provided by tracking helps lower costs by reducing both downtime and overtime.

So how can businesses circumvent affordability and employee privacy concerns?

One way is to accomplish both is to use a service that doesn't involve extra equipment, including software, or a contract, Karonis says.

"If you're not loading apps or software onto someone's personal phone, it's less intrusive for the employee and he or she will be more willing to allow use of their own phone. There's also no added drain on the battery, because there's no app constantly running in the background, and no hitch-hiking on their data plan or incurring a data charge," he says.

"If you make it non-intrusive employees won't tend to feel that you're invading their privacy."

Using a service that charges per location, with no requirement for a time-specific contract, is also more cost-efficient for the business, Karonis says.

"For the small business that's merely seeking to improve efficiency and customer service, constant tracking isn't necessary. That's more appropriate in a situation where employers have large number of people constantly in the field, for instance, UPS. Or, employers who feel the need to monitor unproductive employees," he says.

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There's a growing backlash as the public is subjected to more and more stalking – from cameras mounted at traffic lights to social networking sites recording shopping habits and topics of conversation, Karonis notes.

“We've reached a crossroads where we need to find a balance between surveillance that provides legitimate business advantages and surveillance that invades people's privacy,” he says.

“It really is possible to strike that balance and, in a small business that thrives on trust, mutual respect and fully invested employees, it's essential.”

About George Karonis

George Karonis has a background in security and surveillance, and has specialized in location services since 2005. A self-professed computer geek, one of his chief concerns is balancing the usefulness of tracking with the protection of individuals' privacy. He is founder and CEO of LiveViewGPS, Inc.