

Manchester company nabs GHO contract

By Harlan Levy

When golfers Greg Norman, David Duval, Phil Mickelson, Ernie Els, and the others tee off at the Canon Greater Hartford Open in Cromwell next week, GHO officials will be using Manchester-based Marcus Communications' two-way radios to track their whereabouts.

In far less glamorous settings, state Corrections Department guards last week started using 57 Marcus radios when transporting detainees between jails and the courthouses.

Marcus garnered the two contracts - \$40,000 from the state, five figures from the GHO for 175 radios - because of what its VoiceLink technology can produce: interference-free statewide service. Unlike most two-way radio services, which generally feature a limited 20-mile range, Marcus' wireless technology links its radios via a series of former AT&T 1960s-era microwave towers to extend its network - and thus radio contact - throughout Connecticut.

"It allows the user to roam around the state just like with your cell phone," Chief Marketing Officer Chad Hart said. "The user doesn't care where he is or what site he's on, and that's a breakthrough for two-way radio technology."

For Correction officials, maintaining unbroken contact is necessary for covering all circumstances. The previous system failed to penetrate "dead zones," Hart says, some as close as a few blocks from the courthouses.

Unlike other two-way radio systems, Marcus' technology also allows for group calls.

"Instead of talking one-to-one, you can be talking to multiple people, so you can have a fleet of 100 and talk to all at once, or talk to 10 or talk to one," Hart says. "If you want to summon all your guards at once, our system lets you do that. With other systems you'd have to inform each individual guard."

At the GHO, the ability to communicate with disparate groups can be significant, Hart says.

"If there is a problem you want to be able to call all your security guards or all those in the region and have them come to an area at once," Hart says, adding that the very large scale of the event demands coordination among security personnel, overall tournament functionaries, and the various vendors.

For correction officials, interference-free contact and the group calling ability minimize risks posed by campus systems that only cover individual buildings, Hart says.

"They had dead zones in parking lots," Hart says, "so when they would go outside, their radios would stop working, and they couldn't communicate. If you have someone outside and have trouble inside, you can't tell them to come back."

Prisoners are a major concern. "If you have any kind of outside activity, if you have dead zones it puts you at risk," Hart says. Guards can now communicate throughout a trip.

Marcus, based in Manchester for 33 years, competes against much bigger firms. Nextel and Cingular are its main competitors, Hart says.

“They don’t have two – ways, but a lot of customers who only want to communicate with their staff had to go to people like that for cell phones,” Hart says, “But that’s a very high cost.”

Marcus charges \$30 a month for unlimited calling per individual two – way radio.

“We’re calling them radios,” Hart says, “but there more rugged and have a longer life than cell phones and they’re meant for industrial use.”

Other clients include the Middletown and Rocky Hill police departments. Marcus has 30 employees and has been in business in Manchester for 33 years.