"FREE TABLETS TO THE INCARCERATED"

Being connected in this digital age of social media and chat apps, it can sometimes be a little overly complicated to those of us on the inside, especially if you've been missing for the last 10, 20 or 30 years. So much has changed - to say the least. When the Florida Dept of Corrections inmates first started getting tablets back in 2017, they cost a pretty penny and didn't come with much instruction. You basically had to have the means and the know-how to buy and operate the damn thing... and it was a learning process even then. When a old-timer asked me to help him create a eight character password, I jokingly told him to just put in snow white and the seven dwarves... which he actually started to type in. I knew right then and there that the upgrade to such technology would take some getting used to - if you could even afford the pricey gadget. Then came the commencement of "Free CoAer Tablets" and all the hype loose. On the flip side, it was heaven for those in the prison telecommunications business with deep pockets and short arms. Let me explain so it makes cents.

Since as early as 2016, Internment telecommunications companies like Global TEL Link, JPay
And Securus have been issuing out thousands of free tablets to inmates in numerous states... Colorado being the very first. It has thus expanded to such states as Florida, Georgia, Missouri, Indiana, Connecticut, and New York—and even birthed new telecommunications platforms like Unity. Companies like JPay and Securus* mind you JPay is owned by Securus—a conglomerate of prison telecommunications that exposed the Mobile Data of potentially every American to hackers back in 2018—often sign lucrative contracts with entire state penal systems and there's usually no type of inmate consent involved. Promotional sale pitches by professional salespeople have marketed these free tablets as a way for us on the inside to self-educate, prepare for release, and better communicate with loved ones. However, the underlying economics behind these "free tablets" inspires a money grab for every greedy body with their hand in the proverbial cookie jar—from state officials to the distributors themselves.

For instance, the prison industrial complex can pilfer anywhere from 10% to 50% of the money generated from emails alone that have been sent by those they incarcerate. Securus—*which used to be controlled by Tom Gores, the billionaire owner of the Detroit...
Pistons who gained possession of Securus in Nov. 2018 for $1.5 billion according to records has disbursed approximately $1.3 billion in commissions to the prison industrial complex over the past years. which includes commissions from non-tablet programs like phone calls. Global TEL link and Securus together share about 85% of the prison industrial complex telecommunication services - not to mention the overwhelming majority of prison tablets itself. Fees related to money transfers alone. For example a $12.99 service fee to transfer $100 from the outside to someone inside. Produced an estimated $99.2 million in revenue for companies like JPay. According to the prison policy initiative who researches communication systems in prisons. Sending “one” email to a loved one out there costs us $0.39 in here “two times.” That to attach a picture and “four-fold” for a video chat. Games can cost upwards of $7.99 apiece. Movies $16.99 and individual songs $1.99 each. Some of these prison telecommunications outfits have been accused of using that same money generated in exchange for political favors. The Mississippi attorney general once blamed GTC of trying to bribe the state’s main corrections officer with commissions so that he would cut “more” profitable deals with the company. In the end GTC settled for something like $2.5 million. go figure.

Privacy violations

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ARE NOT UNFATHOMABLE EITHER. ESPECIALLY HERE IN FLORIDA. IN JUNE OF 2018, A LAWSUIT WAS FILED AGAINST SECURUS FOR RECORDING PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN INCARCERATED COMRADES AND THEIR LAWYERS... A DIRECT VIOLATION OF ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGE. SOME OF THESE COMPANIES HAVE EVEN COERCE TO PRISON LEGISLATORS THEIR SENTIMENT THAT THE MORE AN INMATE COMMUNICATES ELECTRONICALLY - THE MORE LITELY THEY WILL SELF-INCINERATE. THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT I DID WHEN I WROTE A EMAIL OF RESENT DURING THE 2018 NATIONAL PRISONERS STRIKE. WHICH ULTIMATELY LANDED ME IN CLOSE MANAGEMENT SOLITARY FOR 18 MONTHS STRAIGHT. AS SHOWN THESE PRISON TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANIES CAN FINESE THEIR WAY AROUND LAWS. FOR EXAMPLE 611 RESERVES THE RIGHT TO USE INMATE DATA FOR ANY BUSINESS OR MARKETING PURPOSE.” While JPay/Securus expects us to have “NO EXPECTATION OF PRIVACY” because “CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES CAN DISTRIBUTE, TRANSFER OR EVEN SELL CONTENT AND/OR RELATED INFORMATION TO OTHER PARTIES.” NOTES ANOTHER ANONYMOUS SOURCE AT THE PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE.

In retrospect, I cannot deny the fact that tablets: the free tablets in general has definitely given us on the inside a better and more convenient way to connect with those on the outside. It has also improved overall compound behavior. Because no inmate wants to lose their beloved tablet over a disciplinary infraction thus creating a more safer environment for # 4 OF 5#
Both staff and inmates alike - being able to email at your heart's content, video chat and download select music, games, movies and TV shows gives us some sort of freedom, if you will. Yet all of the above cost money, so it could be deceptive to call them free, particularly to loved ones of inmates who tend to be much poorer than average law-abiding families and still dish out as much as 25% of their monthly income for phone calls, emails, and digital media content.

My hope is that present and future telecom communications services can not only continue to connect us to the outside world but desist in these excessive fees and halt the domination of our data. After all, free is not really free in a system that has usually profited off of inmate labor and their families.

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