

BI ExacuTrack Q&A

with Jim Buck, Senior Product Manager



Jim Buck, Senior Product Manager, has over two decades of experience with BI and led the BI team that worked diligently to bring ExacuTrack to the community corrections market in 2004. Jim answered a number of questions about this innovative system and how it meets the needs of community corrections officers today.

Q: *Why did BI add a GPS product to its extensive line of monitoring systems?*

A: Because agencies have varying needs, BI believes in offering a continuum of products to its customers. By offering a number of products, we can specifically address the needs of corrections officials, including banked caseloads of offenders who report once a month to offenders who require intense supervision and monitoring. The ExacuTrack GPS system provides a very detailed log of an offender's movement in the community.

Q: *What are the components of the ExacuTrack system?*

A: There are four components to the ExacuTrack system: a non-removable ankle bracelet transmitter; a GPS tracking unit which logs movement data throughout the day; a base station installed in the offender's home; and a central computer and web-based monitoring software.

Q: *How do these components function together?*

A: An officer installs the ankle transmitter on the offender and plugs the base station into a standard power outlet in the offender's home. The offender must carry the GPS tracking unit when he or she leaves home. The tracking unit must remain with the offender at all times when away from home. While the offender travels in the community, his or her movement is logged using GPS signals. When the offender returns home, the tracking unit is placed on the base station and all of the GPS data is immediately transmitted to the central computer. This computer processes the data and provides alerts for selected violations. Officers use the web-based monitoring software to access and update schedules or view alerts.

Q: *Your team conducted extensive research while developing this system. What was some of the feedback you heard about other products on the market already?*

A: We uncovered a range of problems with the early generation GPS systems out there. Some transmitters die without warning or show out of range when the client is actually home. We found that some tracking units on the market today are sporadic in acquiring GPS or the Base Station / Docking Stations require activation to function, adding 15 to 30 minutes for each client installation. Some systems have very clumsy software user interfaces that are difficult to navigate within. We took all these serious complaints into account and have come up with what I believe to be the best product for GPS offender monitoring.

Q: *One of the main features you've heard when market testing this product was its "usability." Can you explain more about this?*

A: The supervising agency officer has a very busy schedule. The last thing they need is to have a product that is difficult to install or monitoring software that is hard to navigate within. ExacuTrack is very easy to use. When an officer logs in to ExacuTrack's monitoring software via the web, the first thing they see on their home page is the status of each client. Clients are color-coded to indicate which ones are in "alert status" for quick response. In addition, officers can get anywhere in the system in three clicks of the mouse. The system was designed from the ground up with "usability" in mind. Officers don't have to "drill down" through multiple layers of the software data to find what they need.

Q: *How did the ExacuTrack team develop such a user friendly system?*

A: Basically we scrapped all of the previous software we had developed over the past 20 years and started over with a true web software application that could be accessed from any computer. We conducted multiple one-on-one sessions with customers to determine what officers wanted and how they accomplished their tasks. Throughout this process we consulted with a "human factors" expert, a software design specialist who takes into account screen layouts, colors, flow of the software, and other factors when interaction occurs between a human and a computer.

Q: *Why is this "usability" factor so critical to the end user of the system, a community corrections officer?*

A: The less time it takes an officer to interact with a computer, the more productive they can be in managing their caseload. Because ExacuTrack and its web monitoring software are so easy to use, officers will be able to focus first on the most important tasks requiring their attention while still effectively monitoring their entire caseload.

Q: *Why is it important that the batteries in both the tracking unit and the transmitter be replaceable in the field?*

A: It is a matter of economics and convenience. Both the transmitter and tracking units have batteries with limited life spans. Because ExacuTrack has replaceable batteries, it is not necessary to ship the equipment back and forth between the customer and BI, which saves considerable time and cost. Consider some of our competitors' GPS products that don't have batteries that can be replaced in the field. When an agency has to de-install and re-install 50 units and ship them back to the manufacturer, this takes tremendous effort and expense.

Q: *How much training does it take for an officer to install a system on an offender?*

A: On average it takes around two hours for an officer to become proficient on this system. After that, each time a system is installed on an offender it takes less than 20 minutes total (including hardware and software).

Q: *If an offender wearing a transmitter becomes separated from the tracking unit, how will an officer know?*

A: The tracking unit generates an out-of-range message. When the tracking unit is placed on the charging base station, this information will be relayed to the central monitoring computer. The officer can configure the system to page him for these alerts.

Q: *Can you describe the different zones the system allows an officer to designate as acceptable or not acceptable for the offender to travel? Why are these important?*

A: Zones have two functions. One type is an inclusion zone, or an area you want a client to be at certain times; the other type of zone is an exclusion zone, where you don't want a client to go. ExacuTrack's zones can be any shape or size, including a circle or polygon. This is important because the supervising agency can be very precise in outlining businesses, schools, even neighborhoods that the individual must avoid or remain within, depending on the goals of the agency. For example, consider a person with a history of dealing drugs. This person would probably be directed to avoid schools. Each school in his area could be an exclusion zone. If the offender entered any school areas during the day, the supervising officer could contact the offender with a stern warning or possible revocation.
