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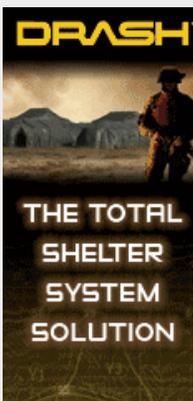
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Army Wants Smartphones, But Can It Make Them Secure?

The fast-developing commercial smartphone industry is offering the Army unprecedented tools for managing information on the battlefield. But the service first must figure out how to take technology that is widely used in the civilian world and make it secure enough for military operations.

Soldiers need to be able to use a single device to connect to the Army network, whether they are in a fire fight in Afghanistan or on vacation, said Col. Wayne Grigsby, director of Mission Command Center of Excellence at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

"Right now we have two or three end-user devices on two or three different networks," the colonel said Oct. 12 at the Association of the United States Army's annual expo in Washington, D.C. "We can't come back from Afghanistan and Iraq and go back to an office, a cubicle, a NIPRNet, and a rotary telephone."

NIPRNet is the Defense Department's internal, unclassified network. Service members should be able to have access to it, as well as secure and tactical networks, no matter where they are or what device they are using, officials said.

This will require an overhaul of policy and doctrine and the alignment of engineering, requirements and acquisition efforts, they said.

Smartphones will play a key role in connecting deployed soldiers to the network, giving them the same information and awareness that is provided to command posts and to leaders back in Washington.

"Can you imagine soldiers out there that are armed with information?" said Brig. Gen. Randal Dragon, who oversees the Army's Brigade Modernization Command at Fort Bliss, Texas. "Soldiers that can see around the next corner, see on top of a hill, know what sheik lives in that neighborhood."

The Army has begun twice-annual evaluations at White Sands Missile Range, N.M., to let troops try out new technologies and see how they integrate with the network. The first of these events took place this summer. Another is scheduled for next month.

Soldiers were interviewed extensively about the 35 systems they evaluated this summer. A report containing their comments has been sent back up the chain to Army leaders, who will decide which items to buy, which to further develop and which to pass on. Troops will be asked thousands of more questions in November when they try out a collection of 48 new devices.

Even when they aren't using the current crop of smartphones, troops think of network-related gear in the same terms, said Capt. Scott DeWitt, commander of a company tasked with troubleshooting new equipment. When soldiers get a new cell phone, they don't take out a manual and read up on it before turning it on, he explained.

"They just start using it," Dewitt said. "They want their equipment the same way."

A team of 300 is tasked with gathering information from soldiers during and after tests. The inquiries seek to get at the heart of the most basic question:

"If you had to go to war right now, would you take this piece of equipment with you?"

Soldiers will provide a multitude of responses that generally fall into these categories: Yes, maybe and no way.

They seem to be saying "yes" when it comes to iPhones and Androids, but their leaders are saying "not quite yet."

"We have a strategy and we're on the road to get there," Grigsby said. But there are a lot of policy changes that need to happen to put mobile applications on the Army network, he said.

The Army's Training and Doctrine Command already has created a couple hundred software applications for mobile devices. The service next month plans to launch a prototype of its soldier-developed "apps" store. Writing these apps is the easy part, said Lt. Col. James McGhee, a lead officer for the service's program to connect soldiers with digital applications.

The biggest challenge will be allowing soldiers to use their personal phones to retrieve sensitive information from the Army network and then making the devices rugged enough to carry into battle and secure enough to be used for tactical missions.

The lead effort in this regard has roots in the Army's decades-long attempts to outfit infantrymen with wearable computers that show them exact locations of friendly and enemy forces. First, it was called Land Warrior. Now, it is called Nett Warrior. And soldiers will be testing out a new smartphone version of the concept next month in New Mexico.

Officials expect to begin fielding Nett Warrior, which connects soldiers and their mobile devices to the tactical network through a radio, in fiscal year 2013.

Even after the service works out the kinks between commercial phones and military networks, leaders must decide who will receive the devices.

"Am I going to buy a handheld for every soldier?" McGhee said. "What's our policy going to be? Can we afford it?"

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Army officials talk as if there is no choice. They even see it as a recruitment issue. Young troops who have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past decade will abandon the service if it can't find a way to stay current and keep them in the loop when they are in the thick of the fight, officials said.

So the Army has revamped major programs to incorporate smartphone technology and is holding classes for soldiers and civilians interested in learning how to develop apps for military devices. Commands across the country have joined the effort, and troops are ready to put these familiar devices through the ringer in upcoming exercises to see how they might function in life-and-death situations.

"The capabilities are almost endless," McGhee said.

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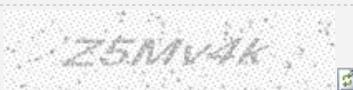
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