

Tablet Computer Guide



Just recently, in a sort of experiment, the Santa Cruz County Main Jail started providing tablet computers to inmates living on each of its (open) housing units. Today, almost every housing unit in the jail has a set number of tablets for *daily* use – based predominately on unit size. Fixed, wall-mounted, tablets are always available to inmates, as are 2-7 other, free-floating machines.

The Main Jail is going paper-less when possible, and important services like commissary orders and inmate request forms are switching to digital platforms. Tablet computers are becoming a necessary part of jail life –there to ensure that inmates get the help they need, and can access many of the important services, and programs that are available. They also have a ton of other cool features.

Permanently placed, wall-mounted tablets are easily accessible in each unit’s “day room.” The handful of free-floating tablets can be used almost anywhere on the unit – except for the restroom and individual cells. Each day, inmates can take advantage of a wide variety of free and premium features, applications, entertainment, access request forms and commissary orders, and dive into a long list of educational resources carefully curated by jail staff.

Each solidly-built, brick-like tablet, is supplied to the jail in partnership with a private firm called “TELMATE.” The tablets are connected to an in-facility intranet system that blocks access to outside internet content - ensuring that inmates can’t access unapproved content and information.

The theory behind this successful pilot program in the Main Jail is that inmates who are busy – learning, active, or being entertained – act better, and cause far less disruption. This means fewer physical and verbal altercations with corrections staff, and other prisoners.

The tablets are the jail’s answer alternative to inmates sitting in front of television screens all day - allowing inmates to utilize their free time for productive and educational purposes (like GED courses). By going digital, the tablets allow officers to save time answering questions and moving around the jail while honoring requests and delivering forms. By most metrics, the Main Jail’s tablet-experiment seems to be working thus far.

When housed, an inmate is given a small business card with a unique PIN# and directions needed to use and access the tablet. With a PIN#, inmates can access a large collection of “Free” and “Paid” content.

Free Content

Yes, the entertainment options on the tablet computers might be fun, cool and interesting. But the jail’s tablets are for far more than just watching a short movie or playing a game. The tablets are a gateway to important forms, resources services in the jail, and home to a wide variety of “Free” content.

Widely used forms including green “request forms,” library book request form, spiritual services request form, and dozens of others are readily available, easily accessible, and all in one place on the new tablets

The exhaustive and easily referenceable “Inmate Handbook” - containing orientation materials, jail rules, and sections that describe how things like visitation, commissary, phone calls, court, meals, and medical services work in the Santa Cruz County Jail – is easily and instantly referenceable.

Religious material like the Bible, and other Catholic, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu “Spiritual Support information” come pre-loaded and available on-demand on each tablet as well.

One of the biggest and most noticeable changes ushered in by the “new era” of digitization is the Main Jail’s commissary process. Gone (mostly) are the days of the “notorious” red-colored commissary bubble sheets. All inmates on “open status,” with access to the jail’s tablets, are encouraged to use the devices to complete their weekly commissary orders.

Techno-neophytes, or those simply unable to use or access one the jail’s tablets, can request the paper version of forms and other materials as well. Less tech savvy men and women can go old school, and request the red-bubble paper version as well.

Paid Content

Each tablet has “premium” or “paid” content that allows inmates to watch on-demand movies, download or stream music, watch CBS and other news, and to send and receive Email messages to-and-from friends and family members. The feature-rich tablets are quickly emerging as the de facto entertainment hubs in each housing unit of the Main Jail.

To access the “paid/premium” aspects of the tablets, inmates need to “buy time” by transferring money from their inmate account to their “tablet” account. Friends and family members cannot add money to an inmate’s tablet account directly but can add funds to an inmate account.

As a new, somewhat experimental, system there are times when the tablets go offline – with inmates unable to access any of the free or paid services on the tablets. Officers on the housing units are encouraging inmates to use the tablets as much as possible and are able to show confused inmates how they work and how to access certain features.

To provide feedback, comments, questions, and to correct errors please contact jailguide@namiscc.org

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