

Licence-free radios for simple, small businesses

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Smaller establishments face some 'new normal' organisational challenges in re-starting operations following the relaxation of COVID-19 lockdown protocols. They are tasked with ensuring returning employees are able to work efficiently and productively while still adhering to the required social distancing measures.

Given that these measures look likely to stay in place for some time, businesses like high street banks and smaller retail outlets, along with primary and secondary schools, will need to consider what solutions they can implement to enforce social distancing rules and help keep employees, customers, teachers and students safe.

Good communications are essential to cope with these new work restrictions. Two-way radios are an ideal solution as they enable social distancing to be maintained, but unlike mobile phones they provide instant push-to-talk and one-to-many communications, as well as individual calling. This enables managers and staff to keep in touch in a reliable and efficient way, especially since employees are more likely to be physically separated which makes face-to-face communications less convenient. Two-way radios enable staff to maintain productivity despite social distancing, as they allow business critical messages to be transmitted instantly.

The group calling feature provides efficient and timely sharing of information with everyone who needs to hear the message in real time. This ensures a faster response to any problem and the ability to quickly deal with a customer request. For all their benefits, mobile phones are a slower and less efficient way of contacting people to impart information or deal with situations requiring a coordinated effort.

Many small businesses may not have considered two-way radio as an option due to relatively small footprints. Licence-free radios are not an expensive option so provide big value for a small investment. For example, Hytera's BD305LF and BD505LF licence free digital radios are considerably cheaper than even most smartphones.

Licence free radios, also known as PMR 446 radios, have a number of key benefits not the least of which is, as the name implies, no Ofcom licence required, which

means they can be used anywhere by anyone at any time. Once bought, or hired, there are no recurring costs like monthly charges as with cellular or Wi-Fi contracts, no Sim card costs, or on-going maintenance charges.

Unlike mobile phones, which do not take kindly to getting wet, radios can be cleaned, disinfected, and shared between staff, which reduces the number of devices required. As with Wi-Fi bands, the 446 MHz unlicensed radio bands can get congested, but Hytera Digital radios support software that helps to avoid signal interference on the same frequency and provides secure channels.

Finally, Hytera radios are rugged and will survive drops, knocks and exposure to vibration, dust, and moisture ingress. This means they have a long shelf life, which greatly exceeds that of mobile phones making them a very cost-effective investment.

Hytera PMR 446 radios make it easy for managers to keep in touch with staff who may be stationed at counters or tills to communicate with staff handling queues outside the building, busy assisting customers, or located in stock rooms or even the delivery areas.

Two-way radios with instant PTT communications mean staff can be mobile and can easily communicate with each other while continuing to focus on their jobs or a customer with minimum disruption. This is not the case if fixed telephones are being used or if the business has to rely on public announcement systems to communicate with staff.

Digital radio technology delivers excellent receive and transmit audio, providing reliable communication. The BD305LF comes with several features, which make it simple and easy to use, especially for first time radio users. An LED indicator displays the charge status through a red and green light.

A voice announcement lets the user know what the channel number is, allowing them to efficiently switch channels even in operating conditions where visibility is limited. The radio has a long battery life of approximately 16 hours in digital mode ensuring it will continue to operate throughout a full shift.

The radio has a digital encoding and error correcting module, which provides it with the ability to avoid signal interference on the same frequency. It is also easy to charge up via the micro-USB port.

The BD505LF licence-free DMR handheld radio is a higher performance PMR 446 terminal. It has IP54 protection against dust and moisture and meets MIL-STD-810 G standards for shock, vibration and relative humidity resistance. It can operate within a temperature range of -30 °C to +60 °C.

Like the BD305LF, it supports dual analogue and digital modes, features the green and red LED charge status indicator, the channel announcement feature and the anti-interference technology. One difference with the BD505LF is that it features separate volume and channel switching knobs, which are kept apart by the central position of the antenna for ease of use. The radio supports 16 channels.

Hytera offers extremely competitive, cost-effective licence-free radios for smaller establishments on the high street, like banks and retail outlets, and for smaller offices and schools to help them cope efficiently with social distancing and the post-lock down business environment.

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