

A Walkie Talkie for the Mobile Era

Written by Marco Attard
07 November 2014

A startup called OnBeep presents a communications device that is a bit like a walkie talkie for the mobile phone era, if not the communicator from Star Trek-- the Onyx, a small speaker-equipped wearable button.



The concept behind the Onyx is simple. It pairs with a smartphone via Bluetooth, and uses the phone's data connection to connect directly with other Onyx units within a pre-defined group. This means touching the Onyx device replaces handling the smartphone in order to make a call, allowing for hands-free communications.

An Onyx group can contain up to 15 people, and a companion iOS/Android app handles communications, group and location management. The actual device is small (60mm diameter) and light (46g), and is designed to clip to bags or clothing without damaging lighter fabrics.

On the enterprise communications side OnBeep says the Onyx communications are encrypted, and thus ideal for BYOD use cases within offices and companies, as well as business teams such as event planners, construction workers or restaurant staff.

Company founders Jesse Robbins and Greg Albrecht says the device was inspired by their time as a volunteer emergency responders, and as such it will “enhance the way people communicate, delivering effortless, group collaboration, using the power of your voice.”

“During an incident, an emergency responder needs to be able to communicate with the rest of the team without losing focus. The last thing you want is to have your attention pulled away from the scene in an emergency,” Robbins says. “To make that possible, we rely on two-way radios.

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They're bulky, ungainly and cumbersome, but they're reliable-- and that's what matters when you're working in life-or-death situations."

The Onyx should be available by end 2014, and OnBeep is currently taking reorders.

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