

THE FARM IS IN YOUR HANDS



The center manager had precisely five seconds to sit down. As he eased into the office chair, the radio at his hip crackled to life.

"Lauren to C.M."

"Go ahead," the center manager said, unclipping the walkie-talkie from his waist.

"I need a hand scanner set up at North I.D."

"I am on my way," the center manager said.

He took the iPad from the desk and began to make his way down the main corridor.

As a center manager, or C.M., at the Robert H. Ewalt Student Recreation Center, Kyle Brunson is always on the move. He may be called on to troubleshoot an issue with a patron or a broken piece of equipment at any time.

Scott Layher, assistant marketing director for the Robert H. Ewalt Student Recreation Center, said in the past, the recreation center was much more paper-based. Layher said transitioning from a paper-based workplace to an electronic-based workplace has helped the recreation center save time, energy, and resources.

"We had accident reports, equipment reports, that we all had to collate and then tally later," Layher said. "It might have taken two weeks for someone to realize that a piece of equipment needed to be fixed."

Brunson said although the tablet has not completely replaced all of the forms and functions at the recreation center, it has certainly streamlined the majority of his tasks.

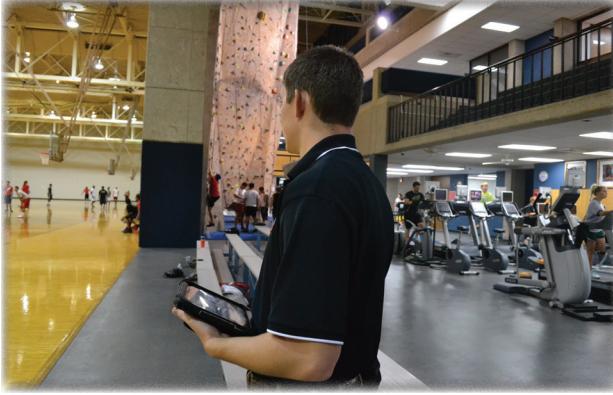
"It just helps reduce the clutter," Brunson said. "Data management and convenience is what it's all about."

Data management is not only applicable in the office, but also on the farm.

Shane Melcher, a location manager for Crop Production Services, said portability is a tablet's biggest asset.

"We do not have to be tied to the office," Melcher said. "We can actually be out and about."

Twenty miles away, Thomas Hicklen, a local farmer, was reaping the same benefits.



Kyle Brunson counts participants via tablet at the Texas Tech Student Recreation Center.

"I do not know how we ever did without it," Hicklen said. "When I go to the Farm Service Agency office, I have it all right there."

Hicklen said his iPad helps him cross-reference a wide variety of information, from insect identification to chemical usage.

Melcher said he makes use of Agrian Mobile, an application that tracks agricultural data, daily. The app enables farmers to look up product information for herbicides and other agricultural implements. It displays a wide variety of data, including any requirements, state restrictions, or organisms that can be affected by the product.

Hicklen said that owning smart devices, such as phones, tablets, or even tractors has also enabled him to seamlessly send and receive necessary information.

"If the tractor has a certain problem, it kicks out a code," Hicklen said. "It will send the code to a mechanic if it is above a certain threshold."

"It will automatically tell that mechanic," Hicklen said. "It will even call his phone!"

Kyle Brunson peered at the indoor soccer court on the first floor of the student recreation center, taking a quick head count on his iPad and saving the form in an Excel spreadsheet. Brunson said it helps recreational center staff make accurate modifications to programs and equipment and better meet their patrons' needs.

Layher said this kind of accuracy and precision is the recreation center's main objective.

"A tablet would even be useful in my major," Brunson said as he looked down at the free weight room below, conducting another head count.

Brunson, a senior range and wildlife management major, said devices such as tablets could assist with everything from plotting routes on hikes to accurately identifying wildlife.

Hicklen said although using a tablet on the farm has many benefits, there are still obstacles to overcome.

"The mobile applications are too limited for what I use them for," Hicklen said.

Hicklen said there are few agriculture-specific applications, and that the ones proposed by John Deere and Valley are still in early stages of development.

Melcher said that many company-specific applications prefer closed source code. He said such measures were not meant to be restrictive to the farmer; instead, closed apps helped protect trade secrets from industry competitors.

"I am running six tablets and eight iPhones," Melcher said. "It is pretty expensive."

Melcher said that many agriculturists are reluctant to use tablets because of security concerns. He said that many farmers worry about their information being out in the open.

"The end goal is for people to get information, and for us to distribute it in a more efficient way."

According to a study conducted by Iver Thysen, informational technology has not yet played a significant role in agriculture's development. The study says farmers use nonlinear decision models that require constant adjustment and progressive updates.

While the farm and the recreation center seem vastly different, in the end, the main objective is the same.

"The end goal is for people to get information faster, and for us to distribute it in a more efficient way," Layher said.

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Taylor Hicklen
Ropesville, Texas

