Technical Bulletin CS-15-02

Managing Applications and Google Play Store with PIVOT

This technical bulletin provides some basic application management best practices with PIVOT.

System Affected

Spectralink 87-series devices (8741/8753)

Description

PIVOT software release version 1.4 (and later) includes support for Google's Play Store & many other Google capabilities. The Play Store allows users to download Android applications ("apps") directly to PIVOT, and subsequent application updates can be automatically pushed down to the device. For consumer-owned devices, Play Store access provides a user easy access to the 1M+ available applications, but for a WorkSmart device such as PIVOT, often serving mission-critical purposes, greater application management by an administrator is necessary.

Customers should have a comprehensive mobile device strategy, but the following provides a basic set of recommendations to manage applications and Google Play access for WorkSmart devices.

1. Disable Play Store App

   Why: Typically a user of a dedicated work device (such as PIVOT) should not be able to install applications as these may not be appropriate for work or introduce security risks. Disabling the Play Store app prevents a user installing apps from the Play Store.

   How: The Play Store app can be disabled via (a) the SLIC tool during initial provisioning, or (b) using the UI Settings> Admin settings [enter pw] >Apps >All [tab]. Swipe down to the Google Play Store icon and tap it. The app window opens. Tap Disable.

   Once disabled, the Play Store icon will disappear, and the device will no longer be able to access the Play Store via the app, and applications will not be updated automatically via Play Store. Google Play Services (e.g. Google Cloud Messaging) will still operate when the Play Store is disabled.

2. Disable Google Play's Automatic updates

Why: If the Play Store app is enabled, and account credentials are entered to provide access to the store, then Google applications (e.g. Chrome) or third-party applications that have been previously downloaded from the Play Store may be automatically updated on the device. These updates occur when the application developer submits new versions of the application to the Play Store. Mobile applications are frequently updated (potentially bi-weekly or monthly), and these changes present risk as updated applications may be buggy or change the user-experience that confuse staff. Instead, Spectralink recommends as a best practice for an administrator to test new applications in a non-production environment such as a lab in order to validate the functionality of the new application on the Pivot platform. As such, Spectralink recommends that admins should prevent these automatic updates, and instead carefully control the rollout of newer application versions after adequate testing.

How: If the Google Play Store application is disabled (see #1), then the automatic updates cannot occur. Assuming the Play Store app is enabled however, an application update can be controlled within the Play Store app. Open the Google Play Store App and tap the lines icon on the top left. Select My Apps, swipe down to Chrome and tap it to open the Chrome app window. Tap the More menu at the top right (the dots icon) and uncheck auto-update.

3. Use an MDM/EMM software for Application deployment and subsequent updates
   Why: It is industry-standard best-practice to employ MDMs (Mobile Device Management) software to manage mobile devices and applications deployment. MDMs allow an administrator to control the availability of applications and remotely push updates to an individual device or group of devices using intuitive web-based dashboards. Additionally MDMs provide administrators the ability to apply security and governance policies, and report devices out of compliance.

   How: An administrator can upload applications to the MDM server and then, using the management dashboard, control which devices receive particular applications. When newer versions of applications are available they can pushed to a test set of users before carefully rolling out to a large number of devices.

   Note: PIVOT supports a variety of MDMs, including AirWatch, Citrix XenMobile and SOTI MobiControl. MDM capabilities vary between Android devices and vendors, so it is highly recommended that a customer evaluate MDM products USING PIVOT before choosing. At this time, SOTI provides the most comprehensive MDM capability.

Google Cloud Messaging (GCM)
Many applications use the Google Cloud Messaging mechanism to push notifications to devices. Disabling the Google Play Store app, or not having a Google account active (i.e. no Google Play credentials) does not prevent Google Cloud Messaging from working.

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