PRESS RELEASE

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Technology could change the future relationship people have with their dogs

New eight-year study from The Open University finds a behavioural link between dogs and technology*

The Open University has conducted a study into the role technology plays in the relationship between people and their dogs. The research, in collaboration with Retrieva Tracking, found that dogs' behaviour changed positively, when a tracking device was used to plot their whereabouts. Participants of the study said the stress of knowing the location of their pet dog when off the lead was minimised and resulted in the dog being given more freedom and becoming more contented.

The research was designed to explore human-animal interaction mediated by technology, with the ultimate aim of fostering human-animal relationships and empowering animals in a human society. The equipment used included a tracking collar and specialist tracking software hosted on a smart phone, iPad, laptop or computer. The evaluation took two different forms: observation of the animals' behaviour and testimonials of their human companions.

When asked, many of the human participants recalled how distressing it had been for them when their dog had gone missing and since wearing the tracking collar the dogs were more relaxed because they were more relaxed. In addition, dogs returned to their owners independently and more frequently, despite their names not being called constantly during the walk.

Some owners also reported changes in their dogs' social interactions as, due to the use of the tracking technology, the humans were willing to give the dogs much more

freedom. One participant commented that their dogs were friendlier towards other dogs because they were able to interact socially unlike dogs that are always on the lead.

Author of the study Dr Clara Mancini, Research Fellow at the Computing Department of The Open University, said: "Nowadays technology pervades almost every aspect of our lives, yet the animals who share our worlds are seldom seen as worthy recipients of our technology. An important aim of this kind of research is to understand how our technological interventions influence animals and their behaviour, so that we can learn how to design technology that can support their welfare and relationships with humans."

Andrew Stuart at Retrieva Tracking said: "A quarter of UK households have a dog and in most cases they are regarded as a member of the family. So the prospect of losing that animal is daunting and a very real threat which affects a lot of people. Add to that the reality that a farmer can legally shoot your dog if it is seen to be of concern to cattle, then the risk is greatly magnified. Tracking your dog on your phone gives them greater freedom and quality of life and it gives you peace of mind knowing they can be found even if you can't see them."

The animals were aged between one and ten and had been wearing the tracking collar for periods ranging from one week to eight years with usage varying from occasional to daily.

The study, which recently was nominated for the Best Paper Award at the 14th ACM International Conference on Ubiquitous Computing, is part of a wider research programme on Animal-Computer Interaction led by Dr Mancini at The Open University.

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A copy of the full study is available along with photography of dogs wearing the tracking collar. Please email: Natalie@sublimepr.co.uk for more details

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About The Open University

The Open University (OU) is the largest academic institution in the UK and a world leader in flexible distance learning. Since it began in 1969, the OU has taught more than 1.8 million students and has more than 263,000 current students, including over 15,000 overseas.

The OU has been one of the top three UK universities for student satisfaction in the National Student Survey every year since the survey began in 2005. In 2011/12 it had a 93 per cent satisfaction rating. Over 70% of students are in full-time or part-time employment, and four out of five FTSE 100 companies have sponsored staff to take OU courses.

In the UK's latest Research Assessment Exercise (RAE 2008) the Open University was ranked in the top third of UK higher education institutions. More than 50% of OU research was assessed in the RAE as internationally excellent, with 14% as world leading.

Regarded as Britain's major e-learning institution, the OU is a world leader in developing technology to increase access to education on a global scale. Its vast 'open content portfolio' includes free study units on OpenLearn, which has had more than 23 million visits, and materials on iTunes U, which has recorded over 56 million downloads. The OU has a 41 year partnership with the BBC which has moved from late-night lectures in the 1970s to prime-time programmes such as Frozen Planet, Bang Goes the Theory, James May's Big Ideas and The Money Programme.

Visit www.open.ac.uk

About Retrieva Ltd

Retrieva Ltd is a UK based product development company using tracking and telecom technology to create innovative solutions to everyday problems. Our Healthcare and Security innovations will be available soon.

The Retrieva dog collar is a durable, waterproof, intelligent tracking device designed to enhance the safety, security and welfare of your dog and to give the owner absolute peace of mind. The collar can be tracked virtually anywhere in the world. Designed for purpose, it will provide locations directly to your mobile phone and can be tracked live by phone or on a computer.

The collar costs £249.99 including all network communications and live tracking for the first year. The second year is £79.99. No contract required.

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