



IMPLEMENTING A HANDHELD RECORD KEEPING SYSTEM

2005 COMPUTERWORLD HONORS CASE STUDY

GOVERNMENT & NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

THE CHARLES COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE NOW USES HANDHELD COMPUTERS TO COLLECT AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF NEW INFORMATION AND REPORT THAT INFORMATION TO THE STATE JUSTICE ANALYSIS CENTER AND THE U.S. OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY, MEETING NEW POST-9/11 MANDATES AND PROTECTING CITIZENS RIGHTS. [20055319]

A Search for New Services



SUMMARY

Law enforcement has always involved a lot of paperwork. But in the aftermath of the 9-11 attacks and in response to a mandate from the state of Maryland against racial profiling, the Charles County Sheriff's Office is now required to collect an enormous amount of new information and report that information to the State Justice Analysis Center and the U.S. Office of Homeland Security. These new requirements were burying the Sheriff's Office in paperwork. To address this situation, the Sheriff's Office created and deployed an automated information collection and management solution to replace its existing time consuming, paper-intensive field information report process. Using iAnywhere mobile technology, the Sheriff's Office developed a secure solution that allows officers to capture data on handheld devices, automatically synchronize that data with a centralized database and create reports in a tiny fraction of the time it previously took when its system was entirely paper-based.

Robert Carrigan,
Chairman of the Chairmen's Committee

Ron Milton,
Vice-Chairman of the Chairmen's Committee

Dan Morrow,
Chief Historian

APPLICATION

It goes without saying that law enforcement is a dangerous profession. What is often overlooked, though, is the enormous amount of paperwork officers and administrative personnel are required to do.

As if the Sheriff's Office in Charles County, Maryland was not already overburdened by paperwork, two events – the creation of the U.S. Office of Homeland Security and a Maryland state mandate against racial profiling – dramatically increased its paperwork burden.

For example, just to produce year-end reports to send to the Maryland Justice Analysis Center, the Charles County Sheriff's Office had to hire a full-time administrator to comb through the department's 16,000 paper field information reports in order to assemble the pertinent data and create the required report.

As it became increasingly buried in paperwork, the Sheriff's Office decided it had to automate some of its paper-based processes. To do this, it turned to leading-edge mobile technology.

The Sheriff's Office realized its new system would have to meet several key criteria. First, to overcome its officers' apprehensions, the new mobile system had to be easy to use and maintain. Officers could not get bogged down by complex technology or complicated processes to keep their devices up-to-date with necessary applications and settings.

The system also had to be secure. It had to ensure that information on officers' handheld devices would be protected even if a device was lost or stolen. It also had to enable the Charles County Sheriff's IT staff to restore information to a new replacement device or a device with a dead battery.

With these criteria in mind, the Sheriff's Office chose iPAQ Pocket PCs as the handheld devices to be issued to its officers. This selection was based on ease of use and portability. For data collection, it selected a software program specifically tailored to meet the needs of law enforcement agencies. Realizing the need for efficient behind-the-scene maintenance of the Pocket PCs, the Sheriff's Office chose XcelleNet Afaria from iAnywhere to automatically and efficiently push updates to 250 Pocket PCs, to secure vital policing information if a device was lost or stolen, and to restore information in the event of a device failure. This behind-the-scene technology and activity is transparent to the officers who simply dock their devices in cradles at the beginning and end of their shifts.

The Charles County Sheriff's Office automated information collection and management system has been so successful, it has become a model for other departments across the state. As the Sheriff's Office contemplates future enhancements, it is looking toward a wireless implementation of the system that will leverage the various components of the system as it exists today.

BENEFITS

The automated information collection and management system has produced a number of significant benefits for the Charles County Sheriff's Office. Specifically, it has:

- delivered a great increase in efficiency and speed, allowing the department to meet its reporting responsibilities to the Maryland Justice Analysis Center and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security,
- empowered officers by providing them with the information they need, where and when they need it,
- ensured the security and integrity of vital law enforcement information, and
- eliminated the manual work previously required to assemble data and create reports.

IMPORTANCE

Leading-edge mobile technology was essential to the development of an automated system to address the crushing burden of paper-based information collection, management and reporting. The specific hardware and software choices made by the Sheriff's Office will enable it to take the system wireless without having to recreate the system.

ORIGINALITY

The fact that the system has become a model for other law enforcement departments across the state of Maryland, and the frequent invitations the Sheriff's Office receives to make presentations about the system to other departments, speaks to the originality of the system and its effectiveness in meeting a pressing need in law enforcement.

SUCCESS

The Charles County Sheriff's Office's automated information collection and management system has been an unqualified success. Officers who initially were concerned about replacing their time-honored, paper-based data collection and reporting processes with mobile technology have come to enthusiastically embrace it.

Additionally, the new automated system has saved the department more time than it has been able to measure, while ensuring the security and integrity of the vital information residing on officers' Pocket PCs and in the department's centralized database (which replaced what was once an archive of 16,000 paper reports).

DIFFICULTY

The two main difficulties the Charles County Sheriff's Office had to overcome were:

- police officers' reluctance to switch from using paper forms to record information to the use of handheld devices that could automatically synchronize with a centralized back-end database, and
- concerns about data security.

As they began using the new mobile system and experienced its ease and efficiency, the officers became believers in the use of mobile technology.