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Sgt. Simon Davies, Project Manager at South Yorkshire Police

power to you



“Our BlackBerry solution just works, freeing up time for front line staff to stay in their communities. Stop and search and intelligence reports are the next steps to increasing the efficiency, effectiveness and visibility of policing.”

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It is a challenge faced by every police force in the UK: how to raise frontline presence, make available the huge amount of back-end data, all the while streamlining operational costs.

South Yorkshire Police comprises over 3,160 police and over 2,500 police staff, supported by 245 special constables and more than 350 police community support officers (PCSOs), making it among the largest in the UK. Like many other forces, it is working hard to tackle problems surrounding visibility and a lack of real-time access to critical information.

“We have been looking at ways to streamline the way we work, as our processes are either paper based or rely on IT systems only accessible in the station,” says Sergeant Simon Davies, Project Manager at South Yorkshire Police.

In simple terms, reducing the amount of time that officers need to spend filing reports back at the station would enable them to spend more time patrolling the community, delivering an improved service to the public. An analysis of the stop and search process found that from the point an officer stops an individual to when they input a ‘Stop and Search’ form (which an officer completes when an individual is searched) into the database can take an average of five weeks or even longer if the form is submitted incorrectly. In 2008, 855 working hours at South Yorkshire Police were spent inputting these forms alone.

In the words of one 20-year veteran: “To be an effective crime-prevention unit our administrative procedures must be first class. But every minute I spend completing paperwork is a minute away from the very people I joined up to serve.”

There was also an opportunity to make time spent on the beat more effective. Frontline, covert and scene-of-crime officers need access to a huge amount of data from back-end systems. Removing the need to rely on radio-to-radio communication, and introducing the ability to view, record and process data without being in the station, would increase efficiencies and improve officer performance.

The solution clearly lay in empowering its officers out on the beat, cutting administration time and providing access to critical police data. The challenge was to find a secure mobile platform with comprehensive coverage across the region.

Solution in hand

The force conducted a detailed, 30-user pilot programme to evaluate the right mobile solution. Among the technologies evaluated was the BlackBerry® solution, which was already being used by senior officers for mobile email, calendar and contacts. Then, the force began examining the various solutions for security compliance.

It quickly decided to implement the BlackBerry solution because it has built-in security architecture and it follows National CESG accreditation guidelines. Data on a BlackBerry smartphone is encrypted at every point during transit and the device is automatically locked and password protected after a period of time. If a BlackBerry smartphone is reported missing, the IT department can remotely 'kill' it to prevent abuse or breach of data.

To start, 324 police officers were equipped with BlackBerry smartphones loaded with an application implemented by South Yorkshire Police and Airpoint, a member of the BlackBerry Alliance Program.

With security issues assured, the secondary benefits soon became apparent. The application provides access to police records via the BlackBerry smartphone and means officers can identify a person, vehicle or location when on patrol. Case in point: a PC used his BlackBerry smartphone to carry out a check on a male he had just stopped driving. The details given by the male brought up a record with a photo that didn't correspond to the suspect. The offender was disqualified and was arrested and charged for having no insurance and for obstructing a PC. Previously, officers would have had to carry out the police checks using their secure radios, which would only provide a verbal description of the suspect and not a photograph.

According to Sgt. Davies, "if it weren't for the photo the PC would have probably let him go. Giving false details is a ploy used by many disqualified drivers. But with the BlackBerry smartphone it is now very difficult to get away with it."

Officers are also using the BlackBerry smartphone's built-in camera to photograph evidence at the scene and to film CCTV footage to help secure convictions.

Towards a streamlined future

Phase two of the roll-out saw the solution extended to nearly 1,000 frontline officers, as well as PCSOs and their supervisors. To date, feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, so much so the force is looking to deploy more BlackBerry smartphones and mobilise even more business processes to frontline officers. It estimates, once fully rolled-out to all 2,500 police officers, it will save 30 minutes per shift per officer, generating efficiency savings of £6,037,475 per year. A police officer can now spend this extra time in the community, policing more efficiently and effectively.

The next step is mobilising National Intelligence Reports regarding offenders, Stop and Search forms and Command and Control. Again, the time saved on these station-based tasks is extra time that police officers can spend in the community.

Identification and Stop and Search forms are just two of nearly 90 day-to-day processes that a business analysis identified as being suitable for mobile help. Seven of them are classified as high potential.

"It's great news that the BlackBerry solution is already benefiting frontline officers. Mobilising Stop and Search forms will be the next step in increasing the efficiency of policing. Then we'll move on to mobilising other high-potential processes," concludes Sgt. Davies.



Significant benefits

- The smartphone's built-in camera is being used to photograph evidence or film video footage at the crime scene, helping secure convictions
- Officers have mobile access to extensive back-end records, including photography, helping to quickly validate identity checks
- Once rolled-out to 2,500 police officers, it will save 30 minutes per shift per officer in reduced paperwork alone, generating efficiency savings of £6,037,475 per year
- All data is encrypted at every point during transit, and the device is automatically locked and password protected after a period of time
- Should an officer lose his or her BlackBerry smartphone, the handset can be wiped remotely, preventing abuse or breach of data
- The BlackBerry Enterprise solution meets CESG's standard for handling government information, up to and including 'restricted' data
- Included on the National Police Framework Agreement, ensuring a simplified procurement process for mobile communications technology and providing cost-efficient mobile services on the UK's best network

