

Five Myths about Public Safety Software

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Public safety agencies today are under tremendous pressure to keep up with emerging trends concerning their software and technology, particularly trends dealing with hot-button topics like mobility, integration, mapping/GIS, analytics/reporting and data sharing.

However, there are several misconceptions surrounding these key issues. This document will seek to reveal the truth behind these myths by presenting industry trends.

Mobility

The Myth: *“We simply can’t afford mobile technology. It’s too expensive to outfit our personnel with laptops, so we’re unable to take advantage of mobile technology.”*

Industry Trends: Agencies today recognize the need to “be mobile,” but it’s not always financially feasible to buy each first responder a laptop. To combat this, agencies are increasingly turning to the powerful functionality of the Apple iPad®. iPads are much more cost-effective than laptops, making it possible to outfit entire units with mobile devices at a fraction of the cost. For example, a Panasonic Toughbook® has an approximate price tag of \$3,000, while a fully-featured iPad costs only \$800. To take advantage of this trend, savvy agencies use software vendors that provide powerful mobile solutions through apps that are specifically designed for tablets.

It’s also important to note that many agencies are opting to integrate the familiar touch and swipe features of public safety iPad apps along with the powerful functionality of mobile CAD software on their computers. These forward-thinking agencies understand the advantage of using both tablets and computers and the value they provide for first responders. That’s another benefit of mobile technology – you have the flexibility of choosing what’s best for your agency.

Integration

The Myth: *“True integration is difficult. Our vendors do the best they can by ‘piecing together’ software and making it work.”*

Industry Trends: Agencies find themselves at the mercy of their vendor when it comes to integrated software. Most vendors are built with a focus in one area (such as CAD or RMS), but don’t provide the other components their clients require. Since these vendors don’t offer a complete public safety solution they attempt to “bridge the gap” by merging with other software companies. By acquiring these other companies, vendors can add the necessary pieces and offer them to their clients, but integrating them together can be convoluted and complex. Since they’re attempting to piece together two completely different types of software, true integration remains an unlikely goal. Some agencies attempt to combat this by buying software from multiple vendors — essentially sacrificing integration to ensure that they have everything that they need.



However, agencies are beginning to select vendors that develop their software with a different mindset: they build multiple solutions that are intrinsically integrated at their core. These solutions are designed to work together, meaning agencies can reap the benefits of fully-integrated CAD/RMS solutions, allowing them to work smarter and faster. With these fully-integrated solutions, agencies can have data flow from call sheet to incident report — sharing name, vehicle and location information.

Some agencies take integration a step further by selecting a vendor that offers both public safety and court solutions — opening the door for all kinds of efficiencies that would otherwise be impossible.

By using software that meets the needs of both their agency and their court, these agencies are allowing one vendor to handle all parts of a citation's lifecycle. Citation and warrant information is shared between a public safety agency and municipal court to ensure a quick and seamless transition from the time they are issued until final disposition. There's no duplicate data entry, fewer user errors and faster turnaround times. It's a trend that many agencies will look to replicate in the near future.

Mapping/GIS

The Myth: *"Mapping is more of a 'want' instead of a 'need.' We aren't a large metropolis, so mapping technology doesn't mean much to us."*

Industry Trends: No matter the size of an agency, proper allocation of resources will always be of the utmost importance. This remains especially true for agencies that lack the manpower and resources necessary to meet their demanding workload.

Agencies are beginning to realize that mapping technology provides them with a very effective method of resource allocation, regardless of their size. In the past, gathering the necessary information in order to create maps was a challenge, but agencies are starting to rely on Esri to provide the mapping data that would otherwise be unavailable. Esri information is available online, meaning everyone has access to information they need to use mapping/GIS technology.

To truly take advantage of Esri and their mapping capabilities, agencies are using vendors that can access Esri's data directly and integrate it with their software. Vendors that use Esri-friendly software can in turn provide agencies with powerful mapping/GIS functionality, such as AVL, proximity alerts, unit suggestions and other functions.

Analytics/Reporting

The Myth: *"Crimes happen and we react to them. There's no way to predict when and where a crime will occur."*

Industry Trends: With the sophistication of advanced reporting and analytics, agencies are using their own data to pinpoint times and places that crimes are most likely to happen and can plan accordingly. Real-time analysis of incidents helps these agencies make faster decisions and put their people in the right place at the right time. It also provides them with valuable data points and trends, which are useful in determining if it is necessary to request additional resources.

The key for these agencies is to be able to develop visual analytics, such as heat maps, to provide easy-to-understand reports that lead to better decision making. This can be challenging when agencies are forced to manually develop these analytics or invest in programmers to create them. To avoid costly and time-consuming processes like these, agencies often turn to third-party companies that specialize in offering this type of data.

Agencies that are operating at the highest levels of efficiency, however, don't have to connect to third-party companies, because they are using software vendors that integrate that information directly into their system. This allows users to run reports and pull analytics directly out of their own software, meaning they never have to navigate to a Website or access a different program to get the information they need.



Data Sharing

The Myth: *“The information we need isn’t located in one place. We have to rely on dispatch to gather information from multiple sources in order to run a full profile on any given person.”*

Industry Trends: Every public safety agency knows how vital it is to gather every available detail about a person you are handling — especially if that person is in commute and the information you need isn’t readily available.

Instead of placing that burden on dispatch alone, some agencies are asking their software vendors to integrate records with other departments and nearby agency databases. The ability to search and access information from one centralized database gives first responders all the information they need to be prepared for every situation.

This type of data sharing is becoming more frequent among agencies located in suburbs or small cities along highways, since they often interact with people who are likely to be commuting and may not exist in their own agency’s database.

Recently, the three Mississippi police departments of Gulfport, Biloxi and D’Iberville implemented data sharing by integrating their records to provide fast access to important information.

“We were hoping to integrate our records — especially warrants and wanted persons — so we could serve more warrants and have more information available to our investigators and officers when they were doing research,” said Rick Fisher, support bureau commander for the Gulfport Police Department. “The project ended up meeting and surpassing all of our expectations. We received a lot more than we ever anticipated.”

To find out more about Tyler’s public safety software solutions, please contact us at publicsafetysales@tylertech.com or call 1-800-646-2633

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Speaking from Experience

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