The City of Ottawa Police Department, KS

Integrated Justice: The Power of Data Sharing Across Jurisdictions

At a Glance

Employees: 29 sworn officers, 6 civilian employees
Population: Approximately 13,000
Tyler Client Since: 2009
Tyler Products Used: Incode®, Brazos™
Website: www.ottawaks.gov/Departments/Police

In Their Own Words:

"Criminal activity is not localized – just because they leave our community doesn't mean they won't commit another crime. Technology connects us so that all jurisdictions get the same information at the same time, so we know how best to respond."

*— Assistant Chief Adam Weingartner
The City of Ottawa Police Department, Kansas*

Situation Overview

Assistant Chief Adam Weingartner of the Ottawa, Kansas, Police Department, knows the importance of integration. The city his police department serves is roughly a 20-minute drive to the City of Wellsville, another rural community within Kansas' borders. Where one city's jurisdiction ends, the other's begins. But criminals never seem to worry about such arrangements.

"Our cities interact with the same criminals on a regular basis," Chief Weingartner explained. "We know we're going to be dealing with the same people, so we want to see each other's information."

The idea is straightforward, and the goal significant: information sharing with other jurisdictions equips officers with the data they need to catch criminals. The road to that goal, however, can be long, winding and filled with manual processes. But technology can act as a GPS system, directing agencies to the best path to take and the shortest route to that destination. Chief Weingartner explained the significance of technology's role in his agency:

Joining Forces

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With the goal of integration firmly in mind, the Ottawa Police Department created a consortium between Ottawa, Wellsville and Franklin County to determine the software vendor best equipped to connect the three agencies. They settled on Tyler Technologies' Incode public safety software to provide a shared solution that allowed for real-time information sharing, among other benefits.

The chief factor in the selection of Incode was the ease of use by those in the field, Chief Weingartner said.

"Then end-user experience was the most important thing. That meant the police officer on patrol had to like it, they have to do so many things at once that we wanted to make it as easy as possible for them," he said.

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"Tyler's Incode was the easiest to use, the easiest to access and reduced the duplication of entry. All of the information flows easily."

Increasing Communication while Minimizing Paper

Ottawa has a local mandate from the county prosecutor that all incident reports must be turned in by 10am. Before the implementation of Incode, these reports were manually printed out and hand delivered across town. But with Incode's case management functionality, all that changed for the better.

"The software lets us build PDF-indexed files, and we can just email the report over. It's really minimized time and paper usage," Chief Weingartner said. "We've been able to completely eliminate paper forms, as Incode allows everything to be entered without a piece of paper."

Chief Weingartner estimated that Ottawa has been able to leverage Tyler's software to reduce their paper usage by 80-90 percent. While limiting paper consumption has saved the city money, it is the increased efficiency throughout multiple departments that has been the biggest benefit. Brazos™ e-citation software – Tyler's electronic ticket writing solution – has played a key role in streamlining workflow.

"E-citations have helped to eliminate another piece of paper that had to go through multiple pairs of hands," Chief Weingartner said. "Now when our officers administer tickets, the information flows electronically. Batch files automatically go to all the people between the police officer and a court clerk, with no manual effort."

Computer Aided Dispatch Links Departments

In order to facilitate better sharing of real-time information, Ottawa, Wellsville and Franklin County turned to Tyler's Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) software. Thanks to the hard work and ingenuity of their staff, mission-critical information is now automatically shared between a number of Franklin County public safety agencies, including county dispatch, the office of emergency management, more than ten fire departments, four separate law enforcement agencies and two jails.

CAD has accelerated the sharing of information between these entities by providing their first responders with the reliable and effective communications they need to work safely and effectively. When a call comes in, dispatchers can quickly direct the appropriate units to the scene with the help of accurate real-time information. Chief Weingartner stressed the importance of collaborating with end users when integrating software.

"We did a large amount of research leading up to our decision to use this software, so we were comfortable using the system once it was implemented. The key was that we involved end users for each

department every step of the way. They had regular training in the system, and that's helped keep everything running smoothly," he said.

CALEA Accreditation

The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) is a credentialing authority that seeks to promote superior public safety services and recognize professional excellence. To become accredited by CALEA is to receive validation that your agency is of the highest quality. The City of Ottawa, after working to streamline virtually all of their processes, can finally boast of being a recipient of this honor.

"The CALEA organization is really recognition that you are following the best practices in law enforcement, and you have to meet strict standards," Chief Weingartner said. "CALEA accreditation has always been a goal of our police chief, Dennis Butler. A big part of it was the automation of our evidence room."

Ottawa's evidence room previously consisted of a paper tracking system to track the activity of personnel and evidence, but with the implementation of Incode, that's been replaced by an almost completely automated process. Instead of manually filing paperwork, Ottawa employees utilize a barcoding system that electronically tracks evidence and keeps employees accountable.

"[An automated evidence room] is so important from an accountability standpoint, and the software gives each person access to the same information. It's all located in the same place," Chief Weingartner said. "Barcoding has standardized the information and it makes accountability easy, not to mention the time savings or the increase in accuracy."

Conclusion

The ability to share information across jurisdictions and between departments is more than just a key factor in the success of Ottawa's police department – it serves as the backbone for their communities.

"When we implemented the software, at each step we asked if it was good for the end user and good for the community, and each time we answered 'yes,' so we moved forward with it," Chief Weingartner said. "We've always had the goal of sharing information. We're a rural city, so it's really important that we can share what we know with each other."

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