

Implementing a Police-Public Interface. A Case Study of Suffolk Constabulary

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The demand for police-public interface capabilities is ever growing. The Home Office 'Police Reform' programme was established with the aim of modernising the police service to meet the changing needs of the UK's population;

- Victims will be updated regularly about case progression.
- Local communities will be able to trigger police action to persistent local problems.
- Police performance will be measured by customer satisfaction.

The HMIC thematic 'First Contact' report, published in 2005, very clearly articulated the need for all forces to provide access to their services via standard telephony, Internet, SMS text facilities, email and the equivalent of minicom, talk-type and Language Line. Best-practice guidelines were published by the Home Office in September 2006, advocating the use of on-line capabilities such as those offered – until recently – by the National Police Portal.

What is a Police-Public Interface?

A Police-Public Interface is a web based portal offering the following services:

- An on-line presence which facilitates the reporting of crime, hate-crime and other structured e-form data.
- On-line registration pages where the public, local businesses and other interest groups can subscribe to receive information from their local police force. For instance, Suffolk Constabulary use their Police-Public interface to disseminate the latest information about crime in particular areas, advice on avoiding becoming a victim of crime, and information on police activity that makes Suffolk an even safer place to live and work.
- Information broadcast according to the preferences of each subscriber, whether by email, SMS text messaging, recorded telephone message or fax. Likewise, information can be received by the Police-Public interface via the same communication channels, making it a truly ubiquitous interface for public contact.

Does it work?

The Police-Public Interface services were originally available to all Police Forces via the Police National Portal and had been used to provide information to the general Public during periods of high security alerts. Following the London Bombings, the National Portal was used to allow the public to send in camera-phone images to the police service, to compliment the intelligence collected through on-line request forms, also provided through the portal.

The Police-Public Interface continues to be available to individual Police Forces and on a smaller community-policing scale the portal can produce exceptional results. In March 2006, not long after Suffolk Police launched their Police Direct service, a text message was sent out to around 6,000 local residents asking them to be on the look-out for a burglar who targeted churches. Within days, a builder who had signed up for police text alerts saw a suspicious man entering a church near Brandon in Suffolk. A man was arrested, charged and appeared before the court where he asked for 76 other church-related offences to be taken into consideration.

Chief Sup Mark Cordell, of Suffolk Police, said at the time: "This outlines the power of Police Direct and proves what an excellent crime-fighting tool it is. The eyes and ears of the public are essential to help us fight crime and Police Direct enables us to harness that power. With the help of Police Direct we have been able to lock up a prolific offender who has committed a large number of church burglaries across the UK."

What is the public perception?

Later that year, in November 2006, Suffolk Police conducted an automated survey of their Police Direct users. The findings, from over 1,300 completed surveys (around 10% of the subscribed user base at that time) showed that;

- Over 99% of respondents felt that Police Direct was a useful service.
- Over 53% felt safer than before, by receiving messages from Police Direct.
- Over 58% had a better opinion of Suffolk Constabulary than before.

Overall, the survey showed that Suffolk Police Direct is almost unanimously welcomed by the public, has resulted in a large proportion of the community feeling safer than they did before receiving the service, and has contributed towards a significant improvement in the recipients' perception of Suffolk Constabulary.

Sgt Bob Chapman who manages Police Direct said; "The results of the survey clearly show that local people are better informed and also feel safer as a result of receiving Police Direct messages and alerts."

Furthermore, free-form text comments revealed a massive positive support for the scheme and some useful suggestions for ways in which the service could be further enhanced to the benefit of the public and the police service. These enhancements have been included in the newly released Police Direct solution which is now proving even more beneficial than its earlier incarnation.

How do I get more information or order the service?

For more information about the Police-Public Interface and how to order the service please contact: justin.bowser@htk.co.uk or telephone: 0870 600 2311.

About HTK and PNN3 Messaging Services.

HTK was selected by Cable & Wireless to provide managed interactive voice, SMS, MMS, email, fax, pager, telex and other public messaging services under the Police National Network (PNN3) framework to all police forces in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as more than 100 organisations in the wider criminal justice community.

The PNN3 messaging service is provided as a secure, hosted managed service delivering a range of citizen engagement solutions that have been compiled with a view to offer, through a central procurement framework, the ability for all Police Forces to provide a raft of interaction interfaces that enable measurable citizen engagement for local consumption.

For general information on HTK services contact: info@htk.co.uk