



Investigation Management Technology: One Force Multiplier That Won't Break Your Budget

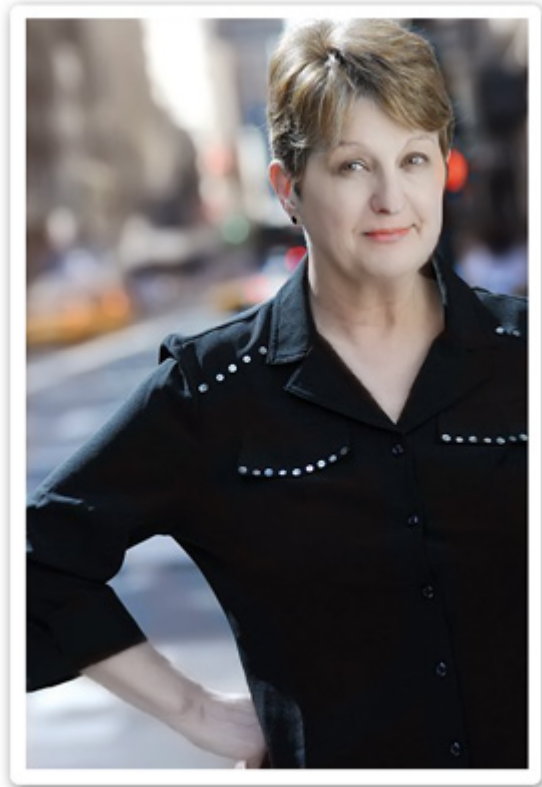
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Supervise, document and work criminal investigation cases the right way, even when the budget is tight and the agency is shorthanded.

No matter which way the budget year swings, law enforcement traditionally finds itself having to make do with less. The most common dilemma for agency heads typically involves allocation and distribution of manpower: patrol runs short, which in turn causes other divisions to be staffed at lower levels. That leaves agencies searching for easy to use, cost-effective force multipliers.

It would be nice if crime backed down a notch or two when the criminal investigations division isn't up to full speed, but that's not going to happen. While it's true some categories of crime have slipped in the number of incidents reported, others rise. And crimes that were merely a whisper in the UCRs a decade ago now show surges that illustrate only too well the extended reach of today's criminal.

Increasingly violent gang activity, organized crime, complex drug operations – all of these result in complicated cases that, many times, are cross jurisdictional. As investigators know, cases that appear simple on the surface can grow and change without warning. And, of course, there is the ever-present news media, on the prowl for the next big story.



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While careful, comprehensive investigations have always occupied police managers, the current intense climate of public interest in criminal cases make them much trickier. *Police are now, more than ever before, expected to do more with less in the most public of forums.*

20-20 hindsight

Good investigation management from the outset is important to the successful resolution of an investigation. All cases – large or small – will show the effects of its management style. For example, take a look at some of the more highly visible and publicized cases in recent history:

- The O.J. Simpson double slaying: A massive compendium of evidence and witnesses with intense media involvement from the outset.
- The JonBenet Ramsey homicide: A case marred by poor crime scene control and hasty conclusions.
- The Duke Lacrosse Team Rape Case: Premature arrests based on inadequate information characterized this national scandal.
- The BTK Killer's crime spree: A huge case involving multiple slayings that sprawled several decades and involved hundreds of officers and countless pieces of evidence.
- The McMartin Preschool Molestations: The case that launched a spate of preschool molestation accusations across the country, involving dozens of children, parents and defendants.



Each of the preceding cases has several commonalities: They all had massive quantities of evidence, multiple investigators, an enormous volume of interviews and generated intense, and often critical, press.

And one more thing – each case initially involved an officer routinely answering a call and completing a simple report.

Until the total nature of the crime or the identity of the victims became apparent, there was no way to predict just how multifaceted and involved each case would prove, nor how important keeping on top of all developments could be.

Good investigation management

It's a no-brainer that good investigation management not only helps bring an investigation to a successful resolution, but also cuts down on mistakes and bolsters the agency's credibility, both in court and in the public eye. Highly organized, cross-referenced investigatory files make it much easier for a supervisor to schedule tasks, organize the team, monitor and report on its progress.

When case files consist of piles of handwritten notes added to a jumble of printouts, reports and photos, it reduces the potential to easily and intuitively cross-reference material, which can ultimately lead to missed opportunities to connect the dots. In addition, the security of case information is open to question and possible compromise under a conventional lock and key protocol.

Add the lack of a cohesive investigation management system and key evidence – physical, verbal, written and other types – can disappear or escape notice. This is particularly true in cases involving long durations and multiple crime scenes, such as serial murderers like the BTK killer, who plagued the Kansas City area from 1974 through 1991 before his 2005 arrest, or Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber, active from 1978 through 1995.

The IT age

Even the grizzled veteran who prefers things the old-fashioned way cannot deny that technology has been a boon to law enforcement. And really good technology – the kind that can be adopted incrementally and run in trials or pilot programs without the “big bang” approach – have proven most successful.



For example, although the rank and file initially resisted dash-mounted cameras, agencies eventually embraced the technology. The results – the vindication of officers who were falsely accused, as well as valuable evidence in both convictions and apprehensions. Another advance, computer-aided dispatch, has spurred faster, more accurate and safer responses to calls for service.

Internet use within departments has allowed contact with, and eventual apprehension of the expanding network of sexual predators. Individual computer terminals on desks and in vehicles allow for instantaneous access to the

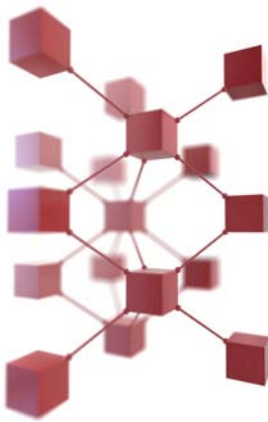
departmental intranet and Web resources, expanding the officers' reaches and capabilities.

While it is true that most technological advances accrue to the benefit of patrol or records divisions, there are many new and exciting developments on the horizon – and on the doorstep – for criminal investigators, too, including reliable investigation management technology.

Why investigation management technology works

In order to do the job, investigation management technology should be cost effective. The best yardstick for cost effectiveness is whether or not the technology acts as a force multiplier – allowing agencies to enhance and magnify their capabilities.

Investigation management software should also be easy to use, with a short learning curve. Ideally, one officer should be trained on its use and he or she should be able to train others in the department.



Information entered into the system should be easily shared, but also provide a higher degree of security than conventional case file systems.

As a resource, it needs to function as a method for bringing officers coming into the in-progress investigation quickly up-to-speed.

Additionally, a good system will have a retentive environment, provide a comprehensive audit trail capable of covert notification in relation to case views, and remain flexible enough to employ as an Internal Affairs tool.

It should also exhibit wide-ranging investigation management with inclusion of:

- Incident reports
- Case notes
- Descriptions of persons, evidence, vehicles, places, etc.
- Photographs
- Mapping of relationships

But an investigation management system is only as good as its functionality. It must be secure, yet possess the capability to share information among multiple users.

Although it may seem like a lot to ask of one program, modern technology has come a long way since MS-DOS and computer-generated pawn sheets were considered cutting edge. Almost every task within a department, including criminal investigations, can be improved with the application of technology.

To sum it up

Money and manpower are always issues in law enforcement. That's why criminal justice experts constantly retool deployment options and look for new ways to expand the capabilities of an already-maximized workforce.

Technology has added greatly to criminal justice flexibility, empowering agencies with the tools they need to go head-to-head with the most sophisticated criminal organizations. And chief among those capabilities is expanding case file management while reducing the amount of assets expended on such tasks, eliminating duplication – which wastes time and precious resources – and freeing up supervisors for other duties.

In an ideal situation, budgets and resources would be unlimited. Even in good times, it's hard to find qualified recruits, but considering the cost of putting an officer on the streets, police must seek other ways to expand their forces.

Consider this: The LAPD spends about \$100,000 to hire a new officer (source: LA News). In Montgomery County, Tenn., the same recruit will run up to \$75,000 (source: The Leaf Chronicle). And even small towns, like Garner, N.C., have to dish out \$54,000 (source: Garner-Clayton Record) to put an additional set of boots on the ground.

As long as the patrol division is not fully staffed, criminal investigations is going to suffer and, face it, patrol rarely is up to full complement. *That means agencies must find other ways to accomplish their mission to protect and serve their constituents, and do it in as cost-effective a manner as possible.*

IT solutions for administrative and patrol use have made great leaps in the past decade, but solutions for criminal investigations have been more elusive.



A handful of agencies developed in-house applications, but they generally lacked the flexibility to share data with other agencies and security remains questionable. Other solutions are complicated and require stiff learning curves.

JADE Investigator, a software application developed specifically for criminal investigators, overcomes the three major obstacles to initiating an IT solution aimed at the age-old problem of investigation management: It is cost effective, easy to master and simple to apply.

Supervisors have found that using JADE Investigator expands their division's investigative capabilities because it functions as a force multiplier:

JADE Investigator does not replace a detective, it enhances the detective's ability to investigate the case by giving the officer a ready platform in which to record, cross-reference and retrieve information.

The supervisor can access that information at any time, even when the investigator is in the field, in court, or otherwise unreachable – which is always handy when the boss asks, “How is that investigation going?”

In fact, deploying case investigative software can be a plus in many aspects of case development.

Using JADE Investigator, for example, one can:

- Easily check case details
- Chart the case progress
- Connect all of the resources under one cover
- Identify associations that might not be readily apparent
- Run searches in the blink of an eye – no more guessing where that piece of information came from or might be
- Share information with colleagues or other agencies
- Control access and the level of information shared
- Keep an up-to-the minute log of who sees what in the file
- Have a well-documented, comprehensive package to present to the prosecutor's office
- Chart the entire course of the investigation from the initial incident report
- Isolate and control media leaks

For law enforcement, computer technology is an idea whose time has come. Dispatch has it. Records have it. Patrol has it. And it works.

Why haven't agencies followed through with a cost effective investigations management software package that also functions as an effective force multiplier?

The answer to that question remains a mystery.