

Beyond Ditching the Paper. Workflow that Works.

In 2008 the Lafourche Parish Sheriff's Office was using a myriad of handwritten and photocopied reports that were manually distributed as part of its Records Management System (RMS).

"The inefficiency in doing that and the potential for losing documents was horrendous," said Sheriff Craig Webre.

The southeast Louisiana parish comprises a sprawling 1,469 square miles. It is known as the "Longest Street in the World" because of its 77 continuous miles of homes spaced so closely together along the bayou. For Sheriff Webre, who took office in July 1992, the challenge was to streamline the agency's workflow to increase accountability, efficiency and officer visibility.

Case Study: Workflow

Zuercher Suite, developed by Zuercher Technologies, was chosen to replace the agency's existing "stovepipe" systems and combine all record-keeping functions in a single, unified software application.

"The idea that you could get a complete suite of products that would interface with every aspect of our organization, including the corrections and civil arenas, was appealing," said Webre, who served as president of the National Sheriffs' Association in 2007-08.

While the benefits of the system are straightforward at the outset, such as saving thousands of dollars in photocopies, its advantages reverberate throughout the office in terms of quality assurance, advancing investigations, timeliness and personnel management.

Efficiency

Anything In the past, every report was a handwritten, physical document. Those papers were collected by supervisors over a 100-mile radius and brought to a central location, where they were transcribed and copied. Then those copies were manually distributed to various offices across the jurisdiction.

With Zuercher Suite, an officer's initial report is entered directly into the system, and based on business logic established by the agency, it is instantly available for review by a supervisor, anywhere in the parish, from his desktop computer or laptop.

The result is a more efficient use of manpower, and more important, the more timely dissemination of information within the agency. A supervisor can assess in real time whether a report might be linked to another incident or require an immediate response or crime alert.



SUMMARY

AGENCY

Lafourche Parish Sheriff's Office

AREA SERVED

1,469 square miles

POPULATION

96,666

EMPLOYEES

460 (Investigations, Patrol, Detention Center, Dispatch, Judicial Services)

PRODUCTS

Zuercher Suite

The report is automatically sent where it needs to be because of the reminders and workflow processes within Zuercher Suite.

“Specialty units, public information officers and investigative units are auto-notified,” said Sheriff Webre, who adds that function of the software saves a dispatcher from making multiple calls to repeat the same information.

The system’s clerical efficiencies also extend to corrections. Jail personnel are inundated with “logs, paperwork and duplication of data entry.”

Just as an officer in the field had to hand-write the same information on multiple forms before Zuercher Suite, jail staff faced the same paper avalanche once a suspect was in their hands. Zuercher Technologies’ software tracks all the required forms for officers in the field as well as for corrections personnel.

Information Sharing

In the past, the sheriff’s office and police departments within the parish operated as crime-fighting islands.

“For agencies to have information stored in vaults that no one can access is an exercise in futility,” Webre said. With Zuercher Suite, information sharing allows the multiple law enforcement agencies in the parish to “connect the dots.” Police reports are accessible to sheriff’s deputies and vice versa.

“That has been phenomenal in increasing our effectiveness in fighting crime and in solving crime,” he said. “We get a complete picture.”

Accessibility to information also extends beyond officers in the field. Through the business logic within Zuercher Suite, court system personnel can retrieve the agency’s data. Historically, attorneys, bailiffs, and personnel from the state Division of Parole and drug court came to the sheriff’s office, occupied clerk time and used its copy machines. Not so today.

Another function of information sharing extends beyond law enforcement entities. Before closing a call, an officer must respond to a Zuercher Suite prompt to indicate whether the event will impact a school-age child. Such incidents might include a death in the family, the arrest of a parent or a house fire.

If an officer responds “yes,” child welfare and school officials receive an e-mail notification and can review the officer’s case narrative. The process helps school personnel respond appropriately to the child’s needs in the wake of an incident. Webre adds that Zuercher Suite also is “tremendous in its interfacing with other systems.” From the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) to the jail phone system, Zuercher Suite is seamless, Webre said.

Working in tandem with the parish’s warrant system, a deputy can request an arrest warrant or a search warrant from the cockpit of his patrol car. A judge will receive a notification and review the request online. He then can issue the warrant, and the officer receives notification in the field and can take appropriate action.

Discretion

Webre, who has more than 30 years of law enforcement experience, explains that discretion only works in law enforcement with the benefit of good information. In the past, officers often worked in a vacuum—

believe everything they are told or be skeptical and believe nothing.

“With Zuercher Suite, an officer’s ability to exercise sound discretion is enhanced tenfold,” he said.

Officers in the field have previous knowledge of how a person interacted with another officer because of name cards and name notes within the program that have been completed by another officer. In domestic violence case, officers can see alerts to other officers, Webre said. The system also combines digital video statements from witnesses with incident reports.

“Previously, cases often were a situation of he said/she said,” said Webre. “But there is nothing more effective than to have someone listen to their family member giving a statement to an officer. It’s hard to make denials when you hear that voice.”

Accountability

In the past, workload discrepancies and logistics often combined to allow things “to slip through the cracks.”

Today, reports are assigned to supervising officers in a randomly designed manner to increase accountability. Also, if a report requiring action is not addressed within a set time frame, another supervisor is notified to review the report through Zuercher Suite’s workflow options.

In addition, Webre said, Zuercher Suite enhances management’s tools to assess officer performance by tracking workload and productivity.

The Lafourche Parish Sheriff’s Office work force was streamlined 10 percent because of efficiencies utilized through Zuercher Suite. And as a result, Webre said, raises were given across the board—in records, clerical, communications, corrections and patrol.

“We are working smarter and doing more with less,” he said.

Rationale

Zuercher Suite, which automates and organizes many public safety tasks, fast-tracked the Louisiana sheriff’s office’s efforts to improve crime fighting, accountability and efficiency.

Everything about the program is functional and logical, Webre said. “Of all the initiatives in my 30 years in law enforcement, this is the most critical and significant in advancing what we do.”



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LOUISIANA