

Case Study: Mobile County Alabama Sheriff Department

Information at deputies' fingertips speeds response. Big on ideas, short on bandwidth — that sums up the situation that the Mobile County, Alabama Sheriff's Department faced. Faster access to information in the field promised to allow more than 160 deputies to serve 500,000 citizens more responsively. To accomplish their goals, they opted for a 3G cellular data network, with reliable connections through the NetMotion Mobility XE mobile VPN.

About the Deployment

"We have put a big emphasis into technology and integrating it into the operations in the field," declares Maj. Chad Tucker, Administrative Assistant. "So, one of the things that we focused on was to switch to a wireless infrastructure in the field, versus using a radio network for data which had been in place for 10 or 12 years." The department replaced the old system with a 3G cellular data network and Dell 6400 laptops in the cars. Officers directly access the MobileCop CAD system as well as a host of web-based applications including the jail management system, criminal justice databases, e-mail and general Internet. Vehicles are also equipped with automatic vehicle location, with GPS receivers transmitting location data.

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Administrative Assistant

To secure the connections and make the applications run reliably, they chose the NetMotion Mobility XE mobile VPN. "We went out and looked at references, looked at other agencies that used Mobility XE and interviewed them," recalls Tucker. "We tested it, and it went very, very well. We were very impressed. There was just no need to test anything else."

Less IT Time, More Public-Safety Time

One of the biggest advantages of using NetMotion Mobility XE was the ability to use VNC remote-desktop software to troubleshoot the deputies' laptops while in the field. Using the old system, when a deputy had a computer problem, he would have to drive back to headquarters. With a territory of 2500 square miles to cover, it could take an hour or more of travel both inbound and outbound. This was a daily occurrence, with at least one deputy having a problem that required a technical-support trip. This was a huge drain, taking a deputy effectively off patrol for a significant part of the day as well as requiring a large amount of IT time. The department's IT director credits NetMotion Mobility XE's link optimizations and compression with making remote troubleshooting practical over the 3G network. The staff could troubleshoot quickly, keep the officers in the field, and not have to leave their desks. And, he reports, the NetMotion system essentially runs itself.

Organization

Mobile County Sheriff's
Department

Industry

Public Safety

Objectives

- Faster access to information
- Reduction in paperwork time and travel
- Simplified access
- Remote troubleshooting

Solution

- Mobility XE Mobile VPN
- 3G cellular data network
- Dell 6400 laptops
- MobileCop CAD application
- Intranet applications
- VNC remote-desktop software

Results

- More patrol time for deputies
- Elimination of time lost for technical support
- Continuous connections
- Simplified access through single login
- Better information access for faster response

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An Office in Every Patrol Car

Thanks to the more reliable connections made possible by Mobility XE, "Deputies in the field are able to basically have an office in their car no different than inside of one of our buildings," explains Tucker. "We opened up the door to tons of information." That includes not just access to databases, but also photographs of missing persons, suspects and vehicles, and Internet research for looking up property details and assisting investigations. The department even has remote video-surveillance cameras in high-crime areas that the officers monitor from their patrol cars. "They love it, basically," summarizes Tucker. "It simply changes the way they do business."

More Cops on the Beat for Faster Response

Relieving officers of the need to drive back to stations in mid-shift to do paperwork has saved the department "a ton of time", according to Lieutenant Frank Cassady of the Administrative Services department. That doesn't just keep that officer on the beat, but also spares officers from adjacent beats from having to cover. That directly correlates to faster response everywhere, and "Being there in a timely manner is a huge thing," states Cassady. "And, if we have a robbery and a picture of the suspect, we can send it from the field, to everybody, right then, before he's too far away from crime scene. There's a better chance that we are going to catch him. Next, we're looking at the ability to let citizens send information about something in progress, via a text or an e-mail, that we route wirelessly to the right people. That's going to make us a lot more proactive – we are going to be able to catch a lot more things in progress."

Continues Tucker: "That's just one example. There are tons of them that we can foresee, and that we'll begin to see in the next couple years now that the wireless Internet is in place. Our officers will see things quicker, know who they are dealing with faster, and share more information, which helps to stop crimes faster."

Keeping It Simple

"Cop cars are now becoming more and more like an airplane, with so many gadgets and controls and switches and buttons, and tools and cameras. But it has to be easy, or the officers won't use it. That's true with any product," declares Tucker.

"Certainly you are going to lose signal at some point during an eight hour shift, that's just inevitable, and we didn't want them to have to continue to log in over and over and over again. The main thing that sold us on NetMotion was being able to have the continuity of a connection. We know that you have to keep things simple and Mobility XE allows that. Deputies simply open up their laptop when they start the car, they do one log in, and that's it."

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