

By Bob Galvin

Taming the RMS monster

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Let's face it. Records management is hardly a riveting activity for most law enforcement agencies. What if you could retrieve, update, store and share your records with automated software? What if your dispatcher could give more information to your mobile data terminal with interfacing software? What if you could write incident reports with the terminal in minutes without leaving the patrol car?

Suddenly the records management system discussion has more pizzazz, right?

The two most important facets of law enforcement RMS are data acquisition and retrieval, making automation attractive. Further fueling the automation trend is a need among police departments to improve accuracy and reliability of records, cut the cost of data entry by eliminating duplication of effort and

allow for integrating computer-aided dispatch and RMS.

Records tracking software can accomplish all of this, and it abounds for varying sizes of law enforcement departments. Before going electronic, however, remember these points:

- Nearly every software program will accomplish the same basic functions. The software must integrate with dispatch, mobile data, field reporting and other modules.

- You should be able to buy a system that meets your budget. A low-priced RMS offering full functionality and integration isn't always a "red flag;" it usually can affordably accomplish the same tasks as higher-priced solutions even if your department must phase in RMS, then CAD, and other key modules.

- Clearly identify what you need your RMS software to accomplish

so you judge software packages objectively and accurately.

It takes all sizes

While large police departments routinely buy records software to address issues with their records, mid-sized departments and smaller ones have the same issues.

Crimestar Corp. of San Jose, Calif., offers its Crimestar RMS System, available for small agencies (serving populations of below 20,000), and mid-size and large police agencies. Two product versions are offered: Crimestar Enterprise Edition for police departments with 30 or more officers and Crimestar Professional Edition for agencies having 30 or fewer officers.

Crimestar RMS combines several reporting processes. It retrieves and stores details on a variety of law enforcement documents such

An officer in Chesterfield, N.H., completes an incident report using an RMS software in his vehicle. By preparing his report electronically, the officer doesn't need to return to his police department, saving time and allowing him to respond to more incidents.



as accident reports, citations, field interviews, incident/crime reports, warrants, driver's licenses, firearms registration and investigations. CAD and mobile digital communications systems are available as well, and work with Crimestar RMS.

According to Alec Gagne, Crimestar Corp.'s president, automating records couldn't be timelier. "There's a greater volume of data to be captured, stored, managed and analyzed," says Gagne, a former police officer. "And this is making automation more necessary now than it ever has been. This used to be the case primarily with large law enforcement agencies, but now that dynamic is pushing its way to small towns," he adds. "There's just more information to be managed."

Chief David Seastrand of the New London, N.H., Police Department, with eight officers, agrees. He initially purchased the Crimestar RMS system, later adding Crimestar's fully integrated CAD and Mobile Digital Communicator (MDC) programs.

He says linking Crimestar

RMS directly into dispatch was critical "so that our dispatcher could record a lot of the initial information and [once sent real-time to mobile data terminals in patrol cars] the officers could backfill the remainder [data]." The result is a more complete record for officers to view, and to compare with master record databases, as they determine how to respond to incidents.

Officers also prepare incident reports using the Crimestar's Mobile Data Communications System — linked to electronic records and tied to CAD — in their patrol car. "It now takes 20 minutes [to prepare the report] where before it would take 2 1/2 hours at the station," says Seastrand.

For law enforcement agencies serving medium to large-size populations, there are other software programs to consider. One is the Aegis Public Safety software suite from New World Systems of Troy, Mich. At the core is a single, integrated database which is the foundation for the RMS. The company's suite

How to choose your RMS program

When searching for the records management and CAD software that will meet your department's needs, there are many facets to consider. Here are a few guidelines to follow:

- Determine exactly what functions you need to have in a records management system (RMS) — categories of reports, degree of customization (if any), individual modules, complex searches, vehicle and person alert, investigations, field interviews, incident/crime reports and warrants, among many other functions.

- You might contact neighboring police departments to see what kind of RMS program they are using, especially how they are able to make CAD and RMS interface with each other.

- Research the vendor you wish to select regarding financial stability, number of years in business, how many systems have been installed, and the depth of the vendor's experience in law enforcement records management.

- Inquire about the level of technical support you can expect with your vendor's RMS. Will there be a designated technical support expert, and one who will become familiar with your particular RMS/CAD application? Is support offered 24/7? And must you pay extra cost for a service and support contract?

- Look at price and what you get for it. Remember, just because some RMS software programs appear far less expensive than some of the more complex software, they still may meet all of your needs just fine.

- Make sure your desired RMS program will be compatible with existing records software on your computers and records management programs at other agencies with which information sharing is critical.

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of public safety software includes CAD, mobile computing and field-based reporting modules.

"All of our modules use the same database," explains Mark Prevost, New World Systems' vice president of marketing. The integrated applications and single database ensure all crime and incident information is linked throughout the suite of software. This offers faster access to information to reduce response time and improves officer and citizen safety during emergencies.

"The biggest driver we are seeing from agencies is the desire to update [records management] technology for efficiency gains," Prevost says.

One of several big trends Prevost sees in this regard is increased focus on agency consolidation whereby, similar to New London PD's situation, multiple police departments are being dispatched out of one central 911 center. Through such consolidation,

several agencies can spread the cost of new technology around, share critical crime data for homeland security, and improve efficiency.

Yet the biggest trend in records management is that police departments want more information from a variety of sources, and they want an easy way to find it. "They need to know how to find information from the raw data they have; to be able to draw conclusions so they can make informed decisions," says Steve Marz, vice-president for Intergraph Public Safety of Huntsville, Ala. Intergraph works with agencies employing up to or more than 1,000 officers and serving large populations ranging between 100,000 and 500,000.

Intergraph's offerings include standalone software modules for



Departments not only are automating their records management systems, but electronically interfacing them with their CAD systems, too.

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CAD and RMS. "Our CAD can integrate with other records systems and our records system can integrate with other CAD systems," explains Marz. The firm also offers a package that integrates Intergraph's CAD and RMS modules.

The Mesa (Ariz.) PD, boasting 850 sworn officers who serve a population of 464,000 abandoned its enterprise records management system in favor of Intergraph's packages. "Part of this switch over is for capturing demographics of the report, and part of it is for data analysis such as where crimes occur and for patrol deployment strategies," explained Shirl Butler, Mesa PD's technology services division administrator.

Benefits

Among the most significant benefits of today's paperless records management/CAD integrated systems are huge time savings and reduced duplication of effort and higher accuracy with instant in-field incident reporting.

Says Marz: "If there's an incident, this software can populate as much into the records side as possible from the CAD system. Officers don't have to do it twice, this increases accuracy."

What's more, when officers are filling out multiple reports, most RMS software programs will pull the same information from a master records database and place it in different records being populated, so



Record management software can track all critical warrant document information.

there is no redundant data entry.

Police departments that serve a vast population from 100 to 1,000 or more officers tend to require extensive customization for their RMS/CAD software systems. This demand stems from police agencies' requirement to have new software integrate with existing public safety records systems as the new software is installed. Examples include ability

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to customize and pre-define RMS data entry screens or the order and flow of data entry forms.

Officer safety is another important factor to consider for your chosen records software, according to Ian Archbell, vice president of marketing and product management for Pleasanton, Calif.-based Tiburon Inc. Tiburon makes LawRECORDS, a records management software program that integrates with the firm's CAD, mobile data, field reporting and mapping modules as well as other provider systems.

Showing you the money

Choosing the right RMS software, and then merging it with your agency's CAD system will be driven

largely by cost. Therefore, don't overlook state and federal funding sources for grant opportunities.

Here are a few funding options to consider:

- For Justice Assistance Grant (JAG), which fund technology improvement programs, visit www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/grant/jag.html.

- For money to unify Web site-linking grant applicants and the U.S. agencies that manage grant funds, see www.grants.gov.

- The COPS Office provides grants and resources for community policing at www.cops.usdoj.gov.

- Funds offered from the Bureau of Justice Assistance's Local Law Enforcement can be used to buy equipment, technology, and other

items directly related to law enforcement. Visit www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA.

In addition to these funding sources, be sure to contact your state's Public Safety Department to see if they offer grant funding for new technology investments. ■

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