

West Yorkshire Police Increase Visibility and Productivity with BlackBerry

West Yorkshire Police is the fifth largest police force in the UK responsible for the protection of 2.1 million people. Comprised of eleven divisions, the force covers an area with a stark mix of rural and urban communities. It is one of only five metropolitan forces in England encompassing the large conurbations of Bradford, Leeds and Huddersfield.

West Yorkshire Police undertook two pilot programs in 2002. The first focused on providing mobile office capabilities to 30 chief officers. As part of the experiment, Paul Friday, Head of Information Systems at West Yorkshire Police, only gave each user ten minutes of initial training in order to see how easy to use the device would be. The trial was so successful that soon every department in the West Yorkshire Police force could make the case for mobile office capability through BlackBerry®.

West Yorkshire Police quickly realized multiple benefits from the BlackBerry solution including:

- Improved police presence on the streets
- Increased officer productivity by providing access to cases and reducing the need to continually return to the station to file reports
- Increased value of a single mobile device for data and voice
- Low training requirements
- Compliance with national policing strategies and security needs

For the second pilot, which looked at mobile access to the Police National Computer, West Yorkshire Police considered a trial with a different wireless device. However, BlackBerry was so well received that they chose to investigate using it for both projects in order that only one device would need to be supported.

Industry

Public Safety/Government

Situation

West Yorkshire Police wanted to increase the visible police presence on the street by enabling crime reporting and work on prosecution files to take place out of the station and on the move.

Company Profile

West Yorkshire Police is the fifth largest police force in the UK responsible for the protection of 2.1 million people.

Solution

BlackBerry handhelds were deployed, complete with secure password and encryption to provide remote access to the Police National Computer.

Results

The BlackBerry solution helped improve police presence on the streets and increased officer productivity. With a single mobile device for data and voice there were manageable training requirements and appropriate compliance with national policing strategies.

A Highly Visible Cause

In August 2001, the Home Office commissioned a study entitled "Diary of a Police Officer" with the aim of gaining a fuller understanding of what is involved in the 'typical' shift of a police officer. The goal was to identify ways to free-up officers' time so that they could perform more reassurance policing – increasing the police's visibility to the public. The study revealed that police officers were spending almost as much time in the police stations (43 percent of their time) as they were on the streets.

Among the report's conclusions was the recommendation that police forces should look to exploit mobile technology. This would provide operational officers with access to data held on the national crime database, the Police National Computer (PNC), to allow crime reporting and work on prosecution files to take place out of the station. Following on from this report, the National Police Mobile Information Strategy was developed, giving regulations and best practices for forces looking to implement mobile technology.

Based on this report West Yorkshire Police started to look for a mobile solution, which would give police on the beat access to the PNC using a wireless handheld. The solution would complement the established Airwave digital radio services. A secondary priority was to be able to provide a mobile office capability (including email, telephone and diary access) to staff that needed to work away from the station. All of West Yorkshire Police's BlackBerry handhelds are voice and data activated to address the need for mobile office capability. The majority of users have handed back their mobile phones, preferring to use BlackBerry handheld for their voice calls.

BlackBerry – an intelligent way to police

The low training requirements for BlackBerry, and the way it was well received by staff, was valuable to West Yorkshire Police. It meant that the technology was accessible to all because of the ease of use and it could be quickly rolled out with minimal training support.

Along with ease of use, a second criteria was selecting a solution which would be robust enough to survive rough treatment in scenarios such as a street chase. Paul Friday, Head of Information Systems for West Yorkshire Police testified, "put it this way, I did the 'waist drop to concrete test' with a BlackBerry handheld, and it passed! Very few of the BlackBerry handhelds we have issued have been returned because they have been dropped or thrown around and they have definitely taken a battering."

West Yorkshire Police also needed security. They wanted to be able to guarantee that in the event of a handheld loss, the information stored on it could not be easily accessed. West Yorkshire Police enforced a number of security processes, including a strict password policy on its BlackBerry handhelds. Every time the handheld is returned to its holster, it automatically locks and a password is needed to access any information. If a handheld is lost, officers can use a 24/7 help desk number to report the loss and within minutes the help desk can bar the handheld from accessing the server and disable the connection.

Reaping the Fruits of BlackBerry

The BlackBerry solution has helped to increase police presence on the streets in Yorkshire by removing the need for officers to continually return to the station to file reports. It has also helped to increase officer productivity as they can now access and feedback case information while on the move.

Critically, the nature of the BlackBerry solution also enables West Yorkshire Police to easily comply with national policing strategies. The national police mobile information strategy stipulates that all mobile data has to be independent of terminal. With its BlackBerry Mobile Data Services (MDS) browser-based application deployment, BlackBerry is an obvious match for compliance. Information on BlackBerry also needs to comply with the Community Security Policy, which combines the British Standard on Information Security Management and the Government Protective Marking Scheme. The secure encryption offered by BlackBerry met all of these requirements.

Overall, the BlackBerry-equipped officers have had a very positive response from the public. "Everyone wants to see their police force employing forward thinking techniques for policing. They see it in films, and it makes them feel safe to know we are always looking to stay ahead of the game," said Friday.

The Benefits

"The public has responded well to BlackBerry," said Paul Friday, Head of Information Systems, West Yorkshire Police. "And, it is helping us to do our jobs more effectively."

West Yorkshire Police continue to grow their BlackBerry solution and expand on the existing list of benefits which includes:

- Improved police presence on the streets
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*Paul Friday,
Head of Information Systems*