

Getting technical with the sheriff's department

One of my most interesting clients is the Washington County Sheriff's Office. They have been shooting at my gun range for over two years now and we've tamed their office computers by getting a good handle on malware with ESet Nod32 antivirus. I get



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to hear weird stories of them dealing with sorry criminals which makes me even more appreciative of the job they do protecting the good citizens of Washington County.

Our county guys and gals have been understaffed, underpaid and under-equipped for years but Sheriff JW Jankowski and Chief deputy Mike Herzog have been working with county commissions to gather more resources over the years or have done their best with what they have. One of their patrol deputies, William Berry, has put in some serious time and effort over the past year and half working a project to implement laptops called Mo-

bile Data Terminals (MDTs) in the patrol cars.

Deputy Berry and I worked together last year to get the new firearms range built and opened on our property last year and I was quite impressed with his initiative along with

political abilities required to get projects accepted and actually completed. Back then while we were working around the lead issue from the ammunition and the erosion problems with the 12 foot high one hundred and 50-yard long sand berm, Berry was also furiously working on the MDT project.

This was not just buying a few \$800 laptops from Walmart, velcro-ing them on to the patrol car's dashboard, and plugging them into the cigarette lighter. The computer hardware has to be ruggedized, the placement and mountings have to be rock solid, the cellular networking must be dependable, and the

software needed to communicate with the joint city/county dispatch software called New World Systems (NWS).

Since the Sheriff's department has 15 patrol cars and trucks, the project required the purchase of seventeen laptops, including two hot spares, with mounting hardware for all the vehicles. The software that goes into the laptops was called New World Mobile Data and that was not cheap. None of this was.

The laptop of choice was a Panasonic Toughbook similar to the ones already in the EMS trucks and the city of Brenham Police cars. These new Toughbooks have the latest Windows 7 running on strong Intel Core I5 processors with 4GBs of RAM viewed on 15" color touch screen LCDs. They all came with five-year total protection plans providing immediate 'no questions' swap out that even covers drops, crashes, liquid spills and even gunshots to the laptops.

Gone are the cellular Air-cards with flimsy wire antennas because those have been replaced by integrated cellular interfaces coupled with GPS technology all combined into a single external roof antenna. The internal Gobi cellular interface connects to the NWS database managed by the city

of Brenham via VPN (Virtual Private Network) over Verizon's cellular network with 90 percent county wide coverage.

The MDT laptops are firmly locked into mobile docking stations that are stoutly mounted in the patrol cars with top-of-the-line Havis Titan mounting hardware. With the rough roads and high speed runs our Deputies make this type of hardware was mandatory.

The test MDTs have been installed and successfully tested during the month of September and the rest will be implemented in the remaining patrol vehicles during October. These MDTs provide a comprehensive data flow to the deputy greatly reducing vocal exchanges between them and the dispatch personnel. This saves a great deal of time, reduces errors in information delivery, and provides a comprehensive amount of data immediately available to the deputy on a real time basis.

A quick touch to the screen delivers all the information about the subject the deputy has just stopped which helps the officer know just who they are dealing with. This comes in very handy just before they walk up to a suspicious vehicle on a lonely dirt road some late night on the far side of Washington County.

Since the MDTs have integrat-

ed GPS and the New World System Mapping software installed, Deputies see where their call is located and the dispatcher sees where the officer's patrol vehicle is current positioned. Also attached to the docking stations are magnetic card readers which are used by the deputy to scan driver's license thereby immediately transferring all subject's name and data to the NWS database for quick lookups.

All this high end technology does not come cheap and the price tag for all the hardware, software, support and implementation totaled up to around \$141,108. The smoking part to the project was that it only cost the Washington County treasury less than \$6,000.

Due to the initiative, resourcefulness, and diligence of deputy William Berry the county had to cover less than 5 percent of the total costs of the MDT project. This was because during those long eighteen months of meetings, calls and negotiations, Berry applied for and secured a \$75,000 grant from the Criminal Justice Department of the Governor Office along with a \$60,332 grant from the Homeland Security Department on the Federal level.

With the support of Sheriff Jankowski and Chief deputy Herzog, Berry then worked with

the County Commissioners to get all this passed and implemented. Commissioner Kirk Hanath was especially helpful since he has been one of the big pushers for better technology in Washington County.

The city of Brenham's IT Department was also a big help since they agreed to manage and support those MDTs. This was a blessing since that type of cooperation and integration enables the Sheriff's MDTs to seamlessly communicate to the city's New World System servers and databases.

It sure is nice when different levels of county and city government can interact well and work together to provide shared data services to each other rather than having costly duplication of efforts.

Bottom Line: Hats off to deputy William Berry and all those who supported this complex and extremely useful project of MDT implementation at the Washington County Sheriff's Office.

Next Week's Column: Back to Blackberry?

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