Q&A: True Mobility for Law Enforcement: Do You Have It?

Few agencies can benefit from mobility like law enforcement. Equipping officers with mobile devices not only improves efficiency and lowers costs, it also has the potential to save lives. Many law enforcement agencies have devices in patrol cars, but oftentimes these devices aren't providing true mobility for officers and are limiting potential benefits. We talked with **Peter Poulin, vice president of marketing for Motion Computing,** about trends in public safety and how true mobility is critical to ensuring officer safety, increasing efficiency and assuring accuracy.

Q: From a mobile computing perspective, what are the trends you are seeing in public safety?

PETER POULIN: We are seeing a new generation of officers that have a different set of computing expectations. This group of public safety personnel grew up with touch screen technology — whether that be ATMs, smartphones or a myriad of other devices. This is a reality law enforcement agencies need to consider when they are thinking about recruiting staff and implementing new technologies. At the same time, agencies also need to ensure they are retaining experienced officers. For them, mobile devices with keyboard peripherals are a great option.

Another important trend in public safety is the Internet of Things. The proliferation of IP-enabled devices in and around the officer's vehicle and any wearable technology the officer might have is driving a need for alternative connectivity solutions that future-proof the organization.

Q: What is the difference between mobility and portability and why is this important to public safety?

PETER POULIN: The distinction between the two is crucial because some people view portable and mobile as synonyms, which limits their ability to see the value of a truly mobile device.

Typically, portable devices are used in an enclosed environment and only while sitting. They are generally awkward to use while standing upright. Mobile devices provide everything that portable devices do, but they also add important benefits, like allowing an officer to stand up outside and/or walk around the scene of an incident. For example, in a non-threatening situation, a mobile device enables the officer to document an accident and capture on-screen witness accounts. Additionally, when the officer needs that information in court appearances and other forums, he or she can easily retrieve and share it.

Q: What types of devices provide true mobility for public safety officers?

PETER POULIN: Tablets bridge the gap between portability and mobility and expand the value a device can bring to an officer. However, the tablet still has to have many of the characteristics of more traditional portable devices. It has to be rugged and resistant to water, and law enforcement officers should be able to view the screen outside. The device should have long battery life, but it should also be light enough that it is easy for an officer to handle comfortably for long periods of time. Excellent wireless performance is also crucial.

Diverse and flexible connectivity solutions — like the patrol car as a hotspot — also enable mobility. Officers are no longer constrained by an antenna that is connected to only one device; law enforcement can now install mobile gateways in police vehicles. This allows an officer to connect all of his or her IP devices through a single gateway and a single cellular contract, which is also more cost efficient.

Q: How can true mobility promote efficiency, accuracy and safety for officers?

PETER POULIN: With a truly mobile device, an officer can use the same computing device in the vehicle, in the field, in the precinct and even at home — there is no need for multiple devices. Additionally, more sophisticated in-vehicle solutions are increasing officer safety and there are now dash mounts that consume less space in an officer's vehicle and don't require disabling the passenger-side airbag.

Automated data capture at the point of engagement is also a huge benefit of mobility. Officers are able to capture data in real time. Handwritten notes don't need to be re-keyed into a device and video evidence and witness testimony can be recorded at the point of engagement, which is often outside of the vehicle.

Documentation cameras with more sophisticated software for annotation and measurements, time and GPS location stamping can all come to the scene. These mobile workflows really aren't possible without truly mobile devices.

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