



COURTESY OF CITY OF WESTMINSTER (COLORADO) POLICE DEPARTMENT

are invaluable for piecing together the who, what, when, where and why.

For a typical agency, requests for audio recordings can number in the thousands annually, and come from in-house investigators, DAs, public defenders, private attorneys, the media and even private citizens.

The problem is that far too many 9-1-1 centers still rely on outdated technology and inefficient processes for handling such requests, which creates backlogs and unnecessary costs. They waste resources duplicating work.

There are exceptions. Consider these two progressive emergency communication centers that handle 9-1-1 calls for the Las Vegas Metro and the City of Westminster (Colorado) police departments.

The Las Vegas Metro PD is the eleventh largest metropolitan police department in the nation, covering an area of 7,560 square miles and serving a population of 3.5 million (45 million if you include tourists). By contrast, the Westminster PD has a force of 184 officers, and covers a 33 square mile suburban Denver area at the foot of the breathtakingly beautiful Rocky Mountains (that's home to 112,000 residents). The LVMPD Communications Bureau takes about 1.5 million 9-1-1 calls a year; the Westminster Communications Center fields around a quarter of a million. It's perhaps not surprising then that the LVMPD also handles more audio reproduction requests, some 400 requests a month compared to Westminster's typical workload of 75.

While on the surface, the two departments are vastly different, they have one key thing in common: Both have made significant efficiency gains by using evidence management technology to work smarter and faster. This technology (NICE Inform Organizer

in these cases) not only saves time and cuts down on manual processes, it also eliminates duplicate work.

"We process audio reproductions for a variety of requestors—detectives, prosecutors, citizens, the fire department and the media," explains Communications Supervisor Karin Marquez, for the City of Westminster (CO) Emergency Communications Center. "We often receive duplicate requests for the same audio recordings and sometimes additional CDs are needed at a later time."

"Before we deployed the new tool, we would have to re-create the incident recordings each time," she adds. "This took a lot of time away from our supervisors because they'd have to research the audio request all over again. We knew we had done the work already but there was no way to replicate it."

LVMPD's Fason expresses a similar concern. "I could receive a request from a detective for an internal investigation and my colleague could receive a subpoena request for the same case records. Typically, one in every four requests for evidence we receive is for the same recordings. Prior to implementing our new technology, we were not able to save or keep track of our incident reconstruction work. This resulted in our team members having to duplicate efforts when multiple requestors needed records for the same case."

ONCE AND DONE— ELIMINATING DUPLICATE WORK

It all starts with a work order to find the pertinent calls related to a case. Once the 9-1-1 and radio call are retrieved, they're saved in an electronic case folder. When multiple parties request the same audio reproduction, records custodians can simply retrieve the original reproduction, without having to do the same work all over again.

"Being able to quickly search by case name or number, and make a new distribution literally takes just a couple of minutes and saves so much time," says Marquez.

The key, according to Marquez, is to develop an agency standard when creating, naming and tagging incident folders in the tool. For example, Westminster uses the CAD event type for the incident name; the case number (if there's a case assigned), and if a case isn't assigned, the CAD event number, for the designated incident number; and for the incident description, a combination of the date, time, and location of the incident. These folder tags make it easier to go back and find the incident folder and associated contents later.

The LVMPD organizes its incident folders using CAD event numbers. "Our CAD system issues an event number whether it's just an incident or an arrest. We use these numbers to record and save evidence. Under each CAD event number, we also create subfolders to separate phone calls from radio traffic, and even use subfolders to note calls where a supervisor or a suspect was recorded," explains Fason.

The ability to retain incident recordings in a tagged virtual case folder has been a huge time-saver for the LVMPD. "We save tons of time not having to duplicate work when we receive requests for recordings for the same case," says Fason. "We've improved our efficiency by twenty-five percent and we can be sure that each party receives the identical set of recordings, whether it's an in-house request or a subpoena. That way there's no error or question regarding any evidence we've provided."

"It really does help eliminate duplication of work," asserts Marquez. "If you've already created the audio reproduction, you simply go