

The Comprehensive Regional Information Management Exchange System: An Information Sharing Success Story

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A key public safety goal is the ability to quickly and cost effectively share information. Throughout the country, the law enforcement community is in the process of developing methods and standards to accomplish these goals. Public safety professionals in Hampton Roads, Virginia, have achieved considerable success in the past year.

Hampton Roads first recognized the need for, and benefits of, sharing law enforcement information across jurisdictional boundaries in the mid-1980s. Since then, public safety professionals have been trying to find a way to automate the process through an effort called the Comprehensive Regional Information Management Exchange System (CRIMES). CRIMES encompasses seven municipalities in the region: Newport News, Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Suffolk, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, and Hampton. Participating cities' police departments jointly administer the program.

With the help of former U.S. Senator Charles S. Robb, the Hampton Roads region received a COPS MORE grant from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services to implement a shared regional justice information system. After reviewing several options, officials in the region decided to implement the Informant system with the support of National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and Templar Corporation. They chose Informant because of its ability to provide real-time information, to allow the municipalities to

maintain their current records management systems, and to be accessible over the existing wide-area CRIMES backbone.

CRIMES, through Informant, allows cross-jurisdictional information sharing across all participating jurisdictions and provides the solution framework for a much broader data-sharing system. The system is based on a nonproprietary 800-plus-element data model, specific to law enforcement and public safety, which was developed through the NIJ. This same data model is in use throughout multiple regions in different states, including California, Florida, Oregon, and South Carolina.

Informant streamlines the process of obtaining information on topics of investigations by reducing the amount of time required to pull pertinent information from several sources. It begins with a single-point query that searches multiple distributed data sources simultaneously. The results are then fused and presented to the user. To do all of this, a user needs only a Web browser and a TCP/IP connection. Only a few years ago, this process required a series of phone calls, e-mails, and other personal communications. Authorized users are now able to access Informant from their desktop or laptop computers and search multiple jurisdictions simultaneously. Additionally, users are able to search with less than complete information. Informant creates a query execution plan, taking the information that the user has and figuring out what information can be returned based on the data sources available. The query then executes.

Because of Informant's architecture, new jurisdictions that want to share their

information with the remainder of Hampton Roads can be added without any impact to the end users of the current system. When a new source becomes available, Informant will automatically recognize it and make the information contained in it available to users.

Even before the system became operational, its success was already becoming clear. "A detective in York County [a neighboring county to the Hampton Roads municipalities] asked one of our detectives for assistance in tracking down a suspect in a bar fight," explains Mark Calhoon, planning administrator with the Newport News, Virginia, Police Department. "In turn our detective called me and I ran the names of the victims and the suspect through CRIMES. It came back that the name provided for the suspect was an alias and CRIMES was able to provide his real name. It also informed us that the suspect had been associated with the victim's girlfriend in the past; it was later determined that they had a prior romantic relationship. CRIMES helped the detective in York County sort out the story, identify the 'true' suspect, and establish the relationships of all the actors in this particular incident."

Because Hampton Roads realized the importance of information sharing and became an early adapter, the benefits will keep increasing as it grows and expands on its infrastructure.

For more information on this project, go to <http://www.templarcorp.com/crimes.htm>