

FACING AN UPHILL FINANCIAL STRUGGLE, HOW DO YOU SOLVE THE POLICING IT INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM ISSUES IN A COST EFFECTIVE MANNER AND IN A WAY WHICH ADHERES TO STRICT GUIDELINES AND CODES OF PRACTICE? **DAMIAN SMALL** REPORTS.

The eFex effect

This was the question City of London Police asked. The force, like many others across the country, had tried and tested various IT and intelligence policing methods available on the market. The force's answer to the question was to opt out of spending the vast amounts of monies that the larger market leading products command, which can cost up to £200,000, simply to capture policing intelligence onto systems.

"We asked ourselves the question: is there an IT solution out on the open market, taking into consideration leading products such as SOCRATES, LOCARD and other operators, or do police forces and crime units unite, as we have done, and build their own software solution?," said Detective

Inspector Jeff Alpe, the force's scientific support manager.

A question can be raised whether an independent consultant on the open market can produce and deliver the perfect vehicle for each constabulary - such as an IT solution - which meets all of a force's requirements. Or, has the City of London Police addressed this question by building their own database wholly designed by the staff in the force's Scientific Support Unit, which addresses their own individual policing issues?

City of London Police oversees an extremely unique operation given the policing of the 'the Square Mile'. The area is primarily populated by businesses and hi-tech crimes are a major focus of the force. "Naturally, an 'off-the-shelf' IT intelligence system would not have fit our own personal

requirements, therefore setting about building an individual system, which could be modified and updated constantly was a perfect option," said DI Alpe.

So a partnership was created to bring to life the very system that the Scientific Support Unit desired.

He added: "In 2002 the eFex intelligence database was born as a backlash to expensive systems, which not only tie you in to long-term contracts but also insist on copyright and give a blanket approach to systems to every single customer – when of course crime is handled very differently by different forces, especially given geographical locations and the nature of crimes within."

Furthermore, added DI Alpe, the eFex database was a third of the price compared to other products available to forces.

Since the creation of eFex many discoveries have come to light and the force has been continuously refining the system to best suit required functions.

"Essentially," said DI Alpe, "eFex is an intelligence system divided into eight modules, which are separate for each policing field and can operate as a stand alone function. The eFex modules consist of fingerprints, labs, photography, tool and footwear, exhibition tracking, intelligence, DNA, and high tech crime."

Each module also builds into the whole eFex system, which creates a seamless IT intelligence product. DI Alpe said it allows the force to cover a wide breadth of issues ranging from identifying patterns of crime to ensuring base information is never duplicated or inaccurate.

"The functionality of the system is vast, it enables us to take information as a tool, using it to form a picture of a crime, taking the crime from the cradle to the grave, to capturing data from the officers' work and being able to utilise it for training," said DI Alpe.

"It can enhance the performance of officers, as well as monitoring data for a vast array of reports including Home Office standards and HMIC audits. Basically eFex is an evidence tracking system and much more, it's set up so the systems works for us and hence cuts back on administrative duties in most fields."

DI Alpe added that the force's success stories can be quantified and monitored closely, along with the ability to use data as an extremely accurate tool for both live investigations and for training and developing staff.

Detective Inspector Ian Gray, intelligence manager at the force's intelligence bureau, helped to oversee the development of eFex and said the benefits of creating a product tailored to the force's specific needs has been demonstrated.

Accessibility

One case that vindicated eFex's value was Operation Magnus, a shooting incident.

"These types of events are rare within the City and there can be some trepidation about how to deal the incident," said DI Gray.

However, the database's accessibility proved to be an excellent means of communication and helped the investigation progress. DI Gray said officers and staff were able to access submissions from the various enquires, which resulted in less phone calls and enquires being made to the scientific support unit.

"Rather than exhibits being physically brought to us, they were inputted electronically, which allowed scientific sup-

The City of London police force is in an unusual policing position because the district has a small residential population to crime levels, due to the fact that their jurisdiction covers one square mile in London's financial district. Also known as 'the City', the area is populated primarily by businesses. As a result, investigations of crime are handled slightly differently than in other forces.

The Economic Crime Department (ECD) is responsible for investigating all majors, complex fraud and other economic crimes in the City of London, and all other serious fraud offices in the south east of England. As the largest department of its kind, seven per cent of the force's police officers are dedicated to the investigation of those fraud cases as come under their remit.

port to consider the exhibits for submission. That not only freed up scientific support unit staff during the investigation but it also demonstrates how the submission process is much more streamlined since introducing eFex."

DI Gray added: "The SIO was able to oversee the exhibits and case officers could build on the investigation electronically. All exhibits were downloaded onto the Holmes database saving considerable time – officers could dial straight into eFex as opposed to locating individuals for specific information."

Over the past two years the Home Office has been requesting more detailed information regarding forces' performance indicators, and eFex has allowed the force to capitalise on that. At the press of a button, eFex can display real time indicators of how staff members are performing.

"As forensic managers we can view how many crime scenes are being visited and how many exhibits have produced a positive result," said DI Gray.

"It also assists in staff development. The eFex database identifies the quality of individuals' identifications. It flags up any training needs in areas such as DNA recovery, fingerprints and footwear marks, which can then be incorporated into overall staff training or used to study an individual SOCO's performance."

DI Gray said the initial intention was to replace the database within the force's scientific support unit, used by the SOCOs. That has now evolved into a web-based application accessible throughout the force.

All submissions can be viewed by officers and staff and the progression of those exhibits can be tracked. Any phone calls, intelligence or updates to a case related to the exhibits is constantly updated and accessible across the force.

"Disclosure and exhibit officers can track/locate all exhibits related to a case remotely from their workstations in the incident room and physically cut and pasted into Holmes, so there is a valuable interoperability with eFex," added DI Gray.

Effective

The Association of Chief of Police Officers (ACPO) believes that, as volume crime comprises the majority of crimes committed (by definition), and thus has a marked impact on a slightly large number of victims, that effective volume crime investigation should be an important factor in any forces crime reduction strategy.

The truth of the situation is that unless crime is adequately recorded, effective crime reduction strategies can-

not be devised. Even before crimes are adequately recorded, however, it must be ensured that sufficient information concerning each crime is collected, and after such information is collected and recorded, it must be analysed and this output (intelligence) disseminated, or at least easily retrieved by those officers involved in the investigation.

The success of eFex has arrived from a detailed study of what is currently available in the marketplace and then negating the barriers identified.

An obvious area which was considered, said DI Alpe, was data entry. "For some products, we noted that the process is time-consuming and non-intuitive," said DI Alpe. "Many fields contained drop-down lists, which were sometimes limiting in their selection and did not offer an alternative method of noting details of the case that were not found in the list.

"Moreover, contrary to this, there were fields with drop-down lists that allowed free text entry when it was unnecessary, later confusing the database search engine and reducing its accuracy."

DI Alpe said that City of London wanted a database that officers and staff could input and have access to.

Consultants observed the force's activities closely in order to help them realise the best product possible.

They learned the significance of scenes of crimes examinations and central submissions and that helped shape the eFex database design.

With the introduction of eFex, City of London Police migrated from a paper and pen system of working to one of

technology, allowing officers and staff to electronically input all scenes of crime information.

Keeping the end users involved proved fruitful for eFex. "All officers and staff were consulted during the design and some valuable ideas were taken on board," said DI Alpe.

"Practical considerations ensured the database was much more effective and useful. People were happy to use eFex and involving everyone made sure the contents of using a new procedure ran as smoothly as possible."

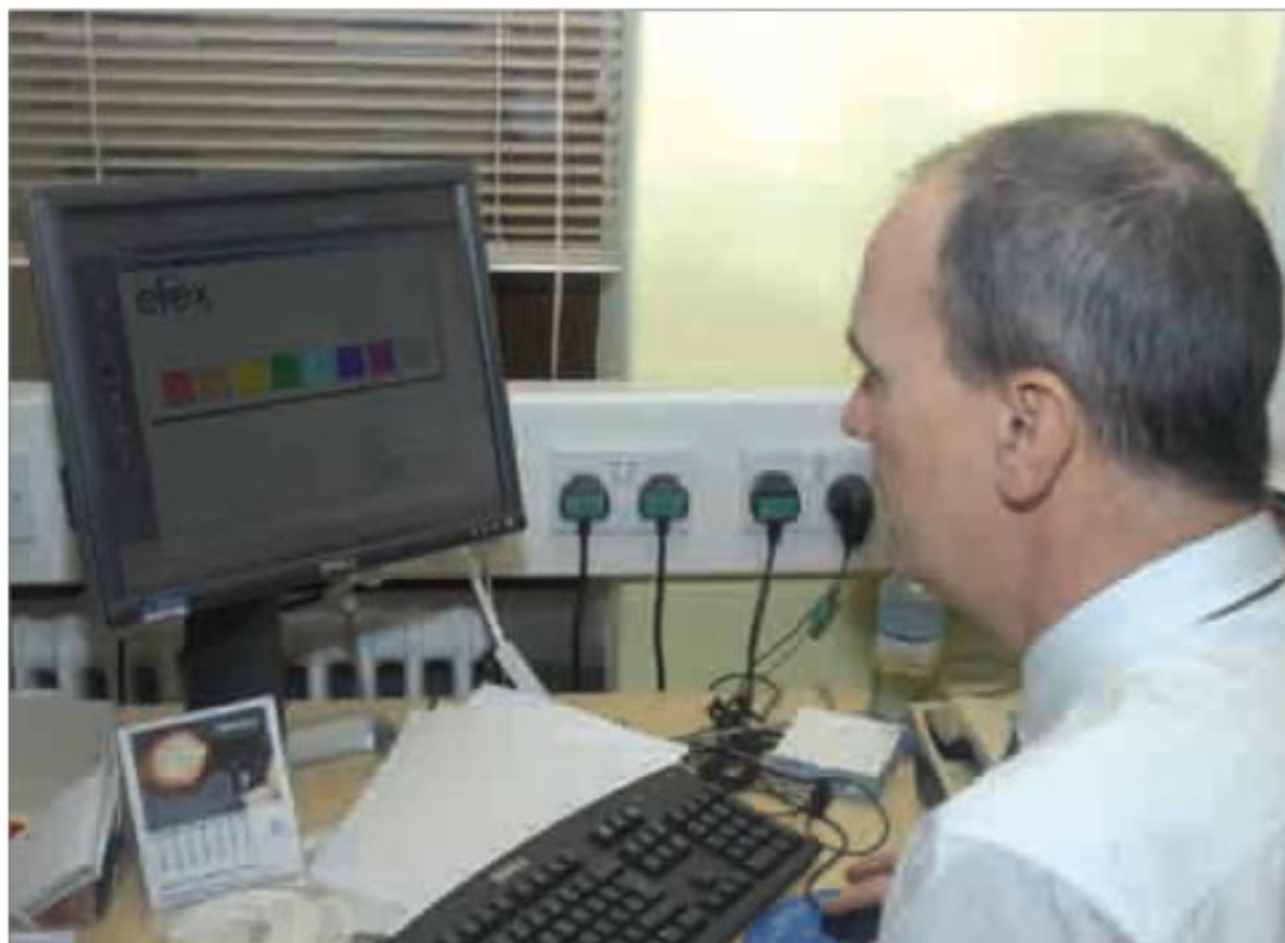
DI Alpe said eFex can be beneficial to both volume crime and major incidents.

"Since its introduction eFex now incorporates submissions from the force's fingerprint bureau as well as DNA submissions. Fingerprint and chemical submissions, for example, from a crime scene are added to eFex and interrogated the same way as exhibits are from a major investigation," he explained.

DI Alpe said for other force considering a similar route as City of London, they must ensure that the introduction of a new product doesn't alter working practices. "We ensured the product migrated into the working practices," he said.

"We didn't have to introduce a product as the supplier wished, so officers and staff were happy that no major changes to how they operated were implemented. It shows that small changes can be constructive.

We have to take into account that the transfer of exhibits to different suppliers can be a problem, especially as suppliers change. The flexibility of eFex is the strongest point, but forces must spend time making sure their product is fit for purpose.



The eFex intelligence database was born as a backlash to expensive systems