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July 2018

It's 2018 and yet another tech revolution is upon us. The question is will law enforcement make the changes necessary to traverse it correctly. It is astonishing how many police agencies are to this day, admittedly so, still managing information via fax machines, paper case files, and by driving (or walking) records to the Court.

PRI has been a partner to, and unflinchingly supportive of, all our clients and law enforcement in general. It is our business to bring success to those interested in operating smarter, not harder; faster, not leisureier; efficiently, not bureaucratically. We seek to educate and modernize law enforcement information management operations and when an opportunity for learning arises, we share it.

[A recent article regarding the Baltimore Police Department](#) noted its incredibly inefficient report rejection and correction process which is handled by sending a paper copy of the report back to the district officer for correction via... courier. Let's learn.

Has not one person at the Baltimore Police Department thought of utilizing email and creating an electronic process for report correction? The article further revealed that reports are keyed in (data entry) and thousands of reports are pending entry- a duplicative process- and a very inefficient one at that ([see #7 of our Top 10 failures list here](#)). Lastly, the agency has no records retention schedules and old records are piling up.

This should not be happening. Anywhere. Ever. At all.

Efficient business process doesn't require a budget. It cuts costs and at a time when personnel shortages are plentiful, processes such as utilizing a courier to send back reports is inexplicable.

Take body-worn camera video as another example. Despite the capability of sending a link to a citizen to instantly view and download a copy of the video they have requested, agencies are still burning discs and sending them via US Mail. If the agency cannot afford to keep the videos in the vendor's cloud application, it should then consider a cost-effective alternative for sending the videos via another file sharing system like [Sharefile](#), from the local server to the customer.

Upon receiving a public request for an officer's video, the [Houston Police Department](#) removes the system's hard-drive from the computer where the video is stored, drives it across town for processing, burns a copy of the video, then drives the hard-drive back where it came from. Learning opportunity.

Before buying the latest and greatest shiny new tech tool, it is highly suggested the agency reviews its current information management business processes and workflows. Such a review will likely reveal room for improvement, the kind of which may negate the need to make a purchase altogether.

If the review still indicates a need for the technology, then it will at the very least reveal how the tech will impact the entire business process. Any new system will affect internal and external stakeholders and their operations in some way, whether it's accessing, sharing, or sending information, it will likely change.

The technology you have at your disposal today, already in place at your department, is likely not being used to its fullest potential. The level of technology available for purchase is extensive. When law enforcement finds itself operating in layers upon layers of systems, it is because the total concept of operations was not considered in advance.

Technology produces information, a.k.a "records", which must be managed efficiently- not via a courier. It's 2018.

While I've been extremely supportive of those who work in the police records management field over the years, I am also disheartened by the all too often occurrence of the wrong person being in this ever so important position. This is a mutual failure of the agency, and the individuals themselves who continue to operate utilizing [archaic information management methods](#); who fail to improve efficiency, embrace technology, or build a strategic plan to modernize reporting, quality control, disposition, information sharing and document management (electronically!).

What we know at PRI is that records are important before most of our clients do. Your IT personnel are IT experts, not records management experts. Be thoughtful of who will manage the data (yes, public records) that will be produced in this continuing tech revolution.

It is time for police agencies to 1) recognize the significant impact on productivity and professionalism the Records Manager has at a police agency and 2) put the right person in that position who will advance modernization.

It is 2018. While the rest of the world utilizes a device in the palm of their hand to bank, shop, travel and send information, many records managers, courts and prosecutor's offices [continue to insist on paper, faxes and wet-ink signatures](#)- all of which is completely unnecessary, time consuming, costly and inefficient. If you are still one to believe that signatures are required and the "originals" mean paper, get online and start learning. Today. Read your state's "UETA" law. And work to be a wise steward of public dollars by improving your agency's operations.

How You Make This Happen

Strategic planning. Resist the temptation to buy the latest and greatest shiny new tech tools without a plan in place; without first determining if the purchase 1) aligns with the agency's goals, 2) is cost-effective and 3) will make the lives of both internal and external agency customers better- our officers, citizens and partner agencies.

They are all part of an inter-connected system and instead of viewing the impact of the tools solely through the lens of internal operations, they must be viewed in terms of their impact on the larger system – workflows within and between agencies, to and from our citizens and how they will function as part of the greater technology ecosystem and service to the public.

If the agency's focus is community policing, build the ecosystem to that end. If the goal is implementing data-driven policing, build a technology posture and business process environment which cohesively enables it. If internal agency reform is the goal, then consider only those systems which will together make it happen.

Lastly, if you don't have the time, resources or capabilities to bring it all together, get [outside help](#). The value in bringing in external expertise will pay for itself quickly through the cost-savings achieved by building a strategic plan, surveying and assessing the department, and making the right decisions and purchases with the total concept of operations, topology, resources and plans mapped out. This is what we do.

Contact PRI at policerecordsmanagement.com for help. We come from law enforcement. We know this business. We're good at what we do.