



Do you work for your RMS or does your RMS work for you?

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Records management systems (RMS) should make your life easier, not harder.

All too often we hear about the persistent problems our customers have with their records management system (and vendor). The pervasiveness of these complaints makes one wonder...are there good systems available? The answer is yes, but not enough.

How often does your system crash? Does it kick you out precisely at the moment you are searching for data needed for the command staff meeting? Do you find yourself having to contact support for the same problem over and over again, only to be told each time a ticket will be created? Does the vendor respond by telling you what you are asking for will require an enhancement (at a cost)?

These frustrations suggest it might be time to get a better system (and company to partner with). The timing is right as the RMS marketplace, at least in some ways, has made a turn for the better. In other ways, it has gotten worse. Buyer beware.

With a handful of new systems built with end-users (you, the customer) in mind, the availability of better tech is greater than ever. Feature-rich yet simple to use, today's newer systems are very different and much better than what you are used to.

Conversely, as investment research over the last several years revealed the public safety software space was ripe for profit, mergers and acquisitions of legacy companies (think of the names everyone knows) by venture capitalist and equity firms have shifted their customer-centric motives to strictly focusing on driving revenue by any means possible, even if it involves thumbing their noses at customers. Got problems with our system? Take a number and get in line and by the way, don't tell other departments about what's going on.

SIGNS OF TROUBLE

- Data is inconsistent and unreliable
- The user interface is complex
- Pulling data is difficult and requires 3rd party software
- Updates must be "rolled-out" and often have bugs (they should occur seamlessly)

The companies which have been around a while and had cornered the market have proven to remain inflexible with challenging software platforms and the usual boxy, complex, tabular user-interface requiring users to click through a maze to get what they need.

Recently, a client of ours shared a rather unsettling experience they had with a well-known vendor. The department's RMS was so riddled with problems, the agency kept their own list of issues and support requests which had not been resolved. The list included several hundred items. The relationship became so strained, and the issues so well-known by other agencies, the company sent a representative who instructed them to not discuss the problems with anyone else. This request of course was ignored, and the department pursued another product.

This was not an isolated incident. Recently PRI was contacted by a consortium of agencies which shared an RMS that was purchased just two years ago. After experiencing the same kinds of frustrations, all partner agencies made the difficult decision to abandon the project and seek a new system. To their credit, they realized the failure was due to a lack of due-diligence and an insufficient procurement process, resulting in the selection of a bad product (and vendor). This time around, we'll be helping them.

The company you select is just as important as the product itself. The best free advice I can give is simply do your homework. Ask, ask, and ask around some more about the systems and companies you are considering for your department. If the feedback is consistently negative, remember to avoid selecting that company when you receive a proposal from them in response to an RFP. No...you are not locked in to having to select the company which scores the best, so long as you state so in your RFP including the conditions for reserving the right to reject any proposal you see fit.

An RFP is an RFP, not a contract. Nor is it an obligation to proceed with doing business with any of the proposing companies. Time and again, we've heard of bad products and bad vendors scoring well during a procurement process, a manifestation of poorly structured RFPs and selection procedures in combination with savvy proposal writers and sales presentations. Dig beneath the surface to uncover what your agency will get beyond the sales pitch. What you find might surprise you. Contact PRI for help.

How PRI Can Help

Since 2008, PRI has been exclusively helping law enforcement agencies procure and manage their systems, records and data in the most cost-effective and efficient manner, and ensuring their compliance with the maze of governing public records, NIBRS and technology standards. Contact us for help at 305-460-0096 or info@policerecordsmanagement.com.