



The Harm of Private Equity on Public Safety CAD and RMS Technology

March 2025

CAD and RMS. The two most important mission-critical systems at the heart of every public safety agency. These systems, their reliability, and the support they are given by the vendor is paramount to any other system. There should be no doubt about the importance they have, however the vendor behind the system is equally, if not more important.

Beginning around 10 years ago, private equity and venture capital investor interest in the public safety technology market exploded. Market analysts had determined that many agencies which acquired new systems in the early 2000s for the purposes of being able to share data in a post-911 era were going to be going through a software replacement cycle. Additionally, the vendor community was poised to continue developing new technology that was slated to drive significant revenue. Accordingly, investment in, and mergers and acquisitions of CAD/RMS companies peaked.

Some CAD/RMS companies have seemingly become commodities which are bought, sold, and/or merged for investment and profit purposes at a pace that has consequential impact on the agencies which use these systems.

According to open-source data from sites such as PitchBook, Crunchbase, and Bloomberg, several billion dollars have been transacted in investments in this area over the last several years alone.

It is reasonable to conclude the funds invested in CAD/RMS companies is used to fuel growth, and sustainable scale - an issue that has plagued the industry for the last several decades. It is widely known in public safety that CAD/RMS companies often grow too fast, and are unable to scale internal resources in a manner which results in good

customer and system support.

The most well-known investment in the industry is that of Bain Capital and Vista Equity Partners, which in 2018 created CentralSquare, a company that resulted from the acquisition and merger of Superior, TriTech, Zuercher Technologies, and Aptean. It is now a public safety technology company with the largest market share of CAD/RMS customers. It is also experiencing a concerning amount of customer churn.

Other well-known vendors have also raised large amounts of investment funds, or have recently sold their companies to investors or other software companies. Raising money, or acquiring debt financing, often occurs as a result of growth outpacing scale, or mismanagement resulting in high customer churn.

The result has been consequential. Public safety agencies which rely on these mission-critical systems have suffered from vendors' growth and profit-at-all-cost management, resulting in unscrupulous sales tactics, insufficient customer support, ongoing software code conflict, inability to conform to NIBRS requirements, and even outright hijacking of agency data upon contract termination. Agencies must be aware of these issues before selecting a new system, and negotiate contract terms and conditions that protect against such unacceptable vendor behavior.

Further adding to what has become a real issue in public safety, the quality of CAD RMS vendor performance, is the centralization of technology applications and vendors, and thus inflexibility when it comes to an agency's use of its own data.

In the early 2000s, public safety was frustrated with having to use a mixed bag of tech systems to meet its needs. Vendors responded and began to build, or through acquisition, create centralized one-stop-shops for CAD/RMS, digital evidence, then BWC/Video. Think Axon Records, Motorola body-worn cameras, Oracle public safety suite.

Now, public safety is expressing frustration with being locked in to these environments, high costs, and what can amount to hijacking of an agency's records and data. In an article posted on nasdaq.com, "Axon Faces New Competition as Law Enforcement Tech Market Shifts", the author Jamie Catmull writes, "Despite Axon's dominance, some agencies are voicing concerns about its closed ecosystem and rising costs. Departments using Axon's tools often commit to long-term contracts bundling equipment with proprietary cloud-based software, leading to recurring expenses that strain municipal budgets."¹

These bundled and centralized system and data models make it difficult when it comes to data portability. In an article by Peregrine, LAPD John McMahon states, "Our technology vendors want to be the end-all and be-all and monopolize the whole technology stack for every one of our organizations", and that it's time to "put pressure on these vendors to stop playing games with law enforcement."

The questions remain, do public safety agencies have the internal resources and expertise to do this? Do they know how to ask the tough questions of vendors and

¹<https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/axon-faces-new-competition-law-enforcement-tech-market-shifts>

how to push back when the answer isn't really an answer? Do they know how to effectively negotiate strict contract terms and conditions that protect the agency and its data?



In January 2025, PRI published the results from its national CAD/RMS vendor satisfaction survey. The results do not bode well for the vendors. It is clear industry change is needed. Better support, better customer service, and better technology integration. [Read the results here.](#)

At the same time, public safety agencies must do better at procuring these systems, hold vendors accountable, and navigate replacement projects effectively. They should seek professional guidance and management services from partners like PRI, a company which ensures project success for public safety. Learn more at policerecordsmanagement.com

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