

Inmates Provide Anonymous Tips With FaceCrok

The Bergen County (N.J.) Sheriff's Office is giving inmates a chance to provide anonymous information that may implicate others involved in crimes, information that could lead to more arrests, more convictions, and eventually, more inmates.

Bergen County launched "FaceCrok" in June 2012, a system that has both public-facing and facility-accessible capabilities. The public-facing side includes access to information on outstanding warrants tied to a Google Maps app in addition to its anonymous tip aspect, and inmates have the ability to provide anonymous tips via their secure computer and telephone access.

Inspector Mickey Bradley, who discussed the system at the Spring 2012 National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Technology Institute for Law Enforcement, explains that inmates have limited computer access in the law library or via system-controlled laptop time, and with FaceCrok, "What we're trying to do is leverage that access to our advantage by telling them they can drop us a line and share information anonymously. They have a wealth of knowledge about crimes taking places both outside and inside the jail."

Inmates also can access the system by pressing a specific option on a county-provided telephone. Bergen County started out with a beta test in two living areas and then expanded it to the 900 inmates and 22 living areas in the system. On the first day of full system use, administrators received more than a dozen tips.

That number pales in comparison to the 60-plus arrests resulting from information received from the community at large during the first three months.

"It's like deputizing a million people in Bergen County to help us out," Bradley says, explaining that the public can view an online "pushpin" map and find out about

fugitives who live, or have lived, nearby, and go on to report sightings. Users can search by name, street address, town and ZIP code, and through a link to the sheriff's office records database, learn about individuals with outstanding warrants generated in Bergen County.

"There's a bunch of people we can't find because our detective division just doesn't have the resources to hunt for them all. However, with child support warrants, for example, the exes know where they are and help us find them," Bradley says, adding that warrants range from child support, to drug use, all the way to homicide.

"We were looking at our warrant numbers and realized we were entering more new warrants than we were making arrests," Bradley says. "We had a 10 most wanted list that we put in front of the public, but FaceCrok has made them all 'most wanted.' A wanted person is a wanted person, and we want to get all of them off the streets."

With that goal in mind, the sheriff's office paid \$17 for the URL <http://www.facecrok.net> and the site name FaceCrok, and used IT staff to determine the necessary fields to create a Google Maps interface and go on to develop the system. Created entirely in house, FaceCrok uses a living space platform and an Oracle enterprise database, populated by a daily flat file dump.

The sheriff's office is now engaged in trying to expand access to, and use by, other counties in New Jersey, starting with Cape May County. In the future, partner counties can work with Bergen County IT staff and give all participants access to the same data. There's no software or hardware purchase involved for anyone who wants to become a partner. Bradley says expanding access could prove a real force multiplier for every agency involved.

"I don't know the numbers, but there must be hundreds of thousands of outstanding warrants all over the

country, and people are constantly moving around,” he says. “I’d like to see this eventually go nationwide, with different access levels for law enforcement agencies, the public and inmates.”

For more information on FaceCrook, contact Inspector Mickey Bradley at (201) 390-8715 or mbradley@bcsd.us. For information on the NIJ Technology Institutes for Law Enforcement, contact NIJ Law Enforcement Program Manager Michael O’Shea at michael.oshea@usdoj.gov.



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