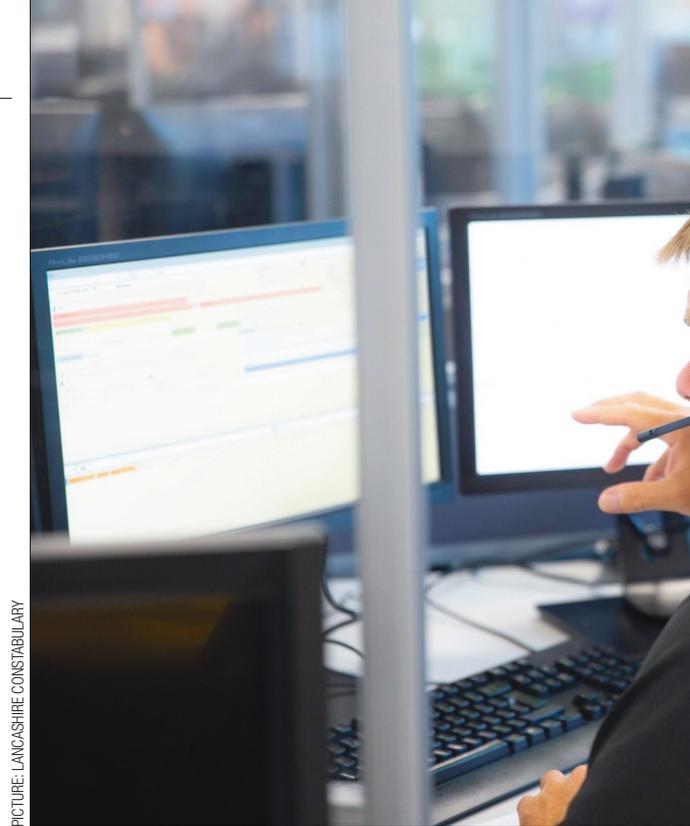


The decision is often whether to save time and money, or achieve better outcomes for victims and swifter justice... but what if police forces could have both? **Jamie Wilson** explains.



PICTURE: LANCASHIRE CONSTABULARY



Jamie Wilson is marketing manager at NICE Public Safety.

Calculated benefits

Since the beginning of time, humans have weighed up the pros and cons of decisions. And in modern times, we do the same for each business decision, each technology purchase too – what return will we get on our investment?

But return on investment (ROI) is not a simple calculation when it comes to a digital evidence management solution (DEMS). ROI is not always just about the numbers. In our conversations with more than 16 forces across the UK, we have been able to learn a lot about how they are benefitting from DEMS, both in terms of quantitative aspects (money and time saved), and from a qualitative perspective as well (eg, swifter justice and improved outcomes).

Of course, we are learning more and more on this subject every day. Following a recent conversation with someone who had overseen the deployment of a DEMS at their force, I immediately reached for my calculator and started crunching numbers. The force in question had estimated that prior to having a DEMS, each piece of evidence received electronically – whether it be CCTV from a business, mobile/cell phone footage from the public, body-worn video from officers, etc – required (on average) one hour of officer time to log, manage, in some cases format and add to a case.

To place the volumes managed into perspective this equated to almost 12,000 pieces of digital evidence received over a two-month period, or

12,000 hours of work. Extrapolating this further, it gets even more interesting.

Consider for a moment that the starting salary for a constable in England and Wales is currently £26,199, which equates to approximately £12.55 per hour. Multiply those 12,000 evidence items (which each required an hour of the officer's time) by this rate and you arrive at a very large number – £140,000. Now, annualise this cost and one can conservatively estimate the yearly expense of managing digital evidence to be well over three-quarters of a million pounds. What is more, this assumes that only new constables are handling evidence (at a lower pay rate), when in all likelihood, more experienced constables, sergeants and inspectors are involved as well.

This is just one very simple calculation, but the same could easily be done with other factors involved in managing evidence.

Consider the cost of officers driving to pick up CCTV video, for example, (not just the cost of their time, but the cost of petrol). Every police force now feels the pinch of soaring prices at the fuel pump. So, reducing mileage not only makes ecological sense but economic sense as well. For example, Cleveland Police has been able to use DEMS to eliminate an estimated 4,500 weekly trips to collect CCTV footage. Now, officers simply request and receive all of that video footage electronically.

This particular benefit is set to become even greater as forces leverage DEMS to proactively engage UK businesses in the fight against crime.



Again, instead of going to pick up CCTV video at thousands of retail locations, thanks to DEMS, many UK forces are now able to remotely request and receive this digital evidence. By signing on to the NICE Investigate portal and registering their CCTV cameras, businesses are able to easily share videos with participating forces. This rapid information sharing goes a long way toward helping to solve and reduce crime.

Lancashire Constabulary is an example of one force championing this effort and reaping the benefits, along with business partners and communities. Currently, more than 9,000 national and local UK businesses have been invited to register their CCTV cameras within NICE Investigate.

In spite of these fantastic numbers, I cannot stress enough that the lasting value of a DEMS is much more than cost savings. It is impossible to assign a monetary value to the many other benefits that DEMS delivers – for example, the ability to get faster remand decisions so potentially violent offenders are not inadvertently set free and able to further intimidate or harm victims.

I would also be remiss, given recent headlines about large numbers of officers leaving the job, to neglect to point out how DEMS can have a positive impact on job satisfaction, by relieving some of the work pressures that overloaded investigators deal with every single day.

At the end of the day, effective policing is all about motivating officers, optimising resources, reducing costs, protecting and engaging communities, and delivering better justice outcomes for victims. DEMS can help police forces accomplish all of these things.

‘Saving time, money and resource’

Lancashire Constabulary’s introduction of a digital evidence management solution coincided with its roll-out of a new body-worn video (BWV) system.

With all the force’s 3,055 officers using BWV, NICE Investigate provided a way to ensure all footage captured by officers would be readily available for them to view.

The next phase of the project was to improve the process of sharing evidence with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). The force operates a centralised criminal justice function, however, when a charging decision is needed, out of hours or during the weekend, officers need to be able to share material with the CPS directly.

Andrew Wilson, project manager at James Harvard (a partner agency of Lancashire Constabulary, responsible for the roll-out of its BWV and digital evidence management project), explained: “It was not uncommon for evidence to take three to five days to reach the CPS. Today, the constabulary is able to do it within the hour.”

He added: “We embarked on a training programme that has seen over 2,300 officers undertake the necessary training package. A significant number of officers have now used the CPS sharing functionality and we have seen some very positive results.”

With NICE Investigate fully integrated with the constabulary’s BWV, Storm command and control and incident information recording systems, the next phase of the project was to streamline and improve how it engaged with residents and businesses.

The force launched a social media and local press campaign to encourage those operating domestic, commercial (including office, premises, pubs, restaurants, retail outlets) and public space (councils) CCTV to register their cameras with its new Constabulary Community Portal (a part of the Investigate platform).

Mr Wilson explained: “We have also collaborated with local membership organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce and National Pubwatch to get the message out as widely as possible.”

In addition to CCTV, the portal can also be used to share other forms of digital evidence and the constabulary has taken advantage of this capability and collaborated with another emergency service – North West Ambulance Service – enabling officers to request and receive emergency 999 call recordings and patient report forms.

“This has removed the need for officers to drive to the ambulance service’s operating centre in Preston to collect a CD,” said Mr Wilson. “Every time evidence is requested and submitted via the portal it represents one less journey an officer is required to make.”

The force has taken an incremental approach to rolling out the system and looking to the near future, it will be integrating its Connect records management system with NICE Investigate, as well as broadening the scope of digital evidence, including custody CCTV and drone and dashcam footage.

“We have just launched a new public appeals process for public dashcam footage, which has successfully replaced a cumbersome and protracted process,” said Mr Wilson.

“It’s the strategic direction of the force that all digital evidence should be managed within NICE investigate.”

He added: “The system has been operational for just over one year and we are using a very conservative estimate that every request for evidence that is completed using NICE Investigate saves the force one hour of admin. That is saving the force time, money and resource that can be allocated to other areas. By maximising the number of people using NICE Investigate, then we can maximise that benefit.”