

A Florida Sheriff's Department Case Study



This case study examines how a Sheriff's Department in Florida switched from outdated paging software to HipLink Software's HipLink wireless messaging solution. With respect for the law enforcement agency's proprietary information policies, county and personnel names have been omitted.

Law enforcement IT departments operate under dramatically different circumstances than their enterprise counterparts. Not only responsible for keeping computer networks up and running, the professionals in these departments are often required to manage critical communication systems that can have a profound affect on life or death situations.

Consider our case study's Sheriff's IT Department tasked with assuring urgent alerts are reliably delivered to the pagers of hundreds of officers and personnel. At the same time, they are also responsible for maintaining an extensive network of servers and applications, and monitoring the data center that houses much of this critical infrastructure.

PROBLEM: The Department's IT team had a problem. The developer of its existing paging software had closed up shop and would no longer be able to provide technical support — something the paging software required on a frequent basis.

The software frequently “locked up” under the burden of sending daily messages to hundreds of pagers, a problem discovered when an intended receiver of a message failed to

respond. Additional calls would ensue, with the inevitable response “I never got the page!” IT personnel were then forced to visit the message sender's physical location to wade through all the message log files.

Needless to say, this was a time-consuming process for the IT staff. More importantly, the Sheriff's Department simply could not assure the urgent notification of any crisis, from a hostage situation across town to a child abduction incident requiring immediate responses.

ADDITIONAL NEEDS: The IT department also manages the agency's desktop computers, mobile computing devices, laptops, enterprise applications and related systems from other municipal law enforcement agencies in the county; all powered by millions of dollars worth of servers housed together in central data centers around the county. Well aware that high temperatures could severely damage this essential equipment in minutes, the Department's IT team had installed special environmental monitoring software and hardware to detect any sudden temperature changes in the facilities. Here again, there was no assurance of reliable alert message delivery for these systems, or alerts of downed routers, switches, or the agency's Metro Ethernet networks.

SOLUTION: HipLink Wireless Messaging Software Once the IT team realized it would have to find a new messaging solution, several applications were tested including

HipLink, a wireless messaging solution with thousands of satisfied users in numerous government agencies and Fortune 500 companies. During the testing phase, the IT staff immediately discovered HipLink could handle virtually any volume of messages. In fact, while the Sheriff's Department typically sends out anywhere from 500 to 800 messages a day, HipLink can easily handle tens of thousands. With flexible configuration options, the solution also fit nicely within the Sheriff Department's price range.

Once the green light was given to purchase HipLink, the messaging solution was up and running within two days. HipLink easily imported all user and receiver contact information from the old software, circumventing the usual legacy system migration headaches. Training the users who send messages was even more of a breeze — about fifteen minutes per user.

In short, within two days of deployment, fifty user groups were capably sending alerts from HipLink to hundreds of law enforcement officers and department staff, including Child Abduction Response Team members (CART), SWAT team members, Crisis Negotiation officers, Canine Units, the Corrections Staff, Patrol Sergeants and numerous others. It was that easy.

HipLink also integrated smoothly with the Sheriff Department's network monitoring applications, including the environmental sensory application. With HipLink, the IT team not only received alerts of server room temperature changes, but also notification when temperatures returned back to normal.

RESULTS: No longer do IT personnel have to take lengthy steps to track down a missing message. With HipLink, the vast majority of messages successfully arrive. As the Department's Director of IT Operations states, "We can hammer HipLink all day long — it never locks up." On the rare occasions when downed carrier service or other outside events affect message delivery, the team can quickly look up message log files right from their office or home PC, or anywhere with a secure Internet connection, using HipLink's web-based administration console.

It is important to keep in mind that the Sheriff's Department uses standard text pagers. Many messaging solutions tend to overlook that these reliable and affordable devices are still in wide use, especially in government organizations. Not HipLink — it works with older messaging devices just as dependably as it does with latest technology.

Of course, should the Sheriff's Department decide to change communication devices in the future, HipLink will easily support any PDA, mobile phone, or pager. It also comes with a number of powerful features including two-way messaging capabilities, ability to send faxes, and even translate text-to-speech to send voice messages to landlines.

NEXT STEPS: Impressed with HipLink's flexibility, the Sheriff's Department sees significant potential for other uses down the road. One possibility is to integrate HipLink with the jailhouse's "panic button" system. Located throughout the building, panic buttons activate flashing blue lights that alert nearby law enforcement personnel of an emergency inside the building. Currently, there is no way to determine which button was pushed and where the crisis is taking place without having to go down the hall to read an LCD display panel. By integrating HipLink to the panic button system, this information would automatically appear on law enforcement pagers.

The Sheriff's Department would also like to evaluate the solution's advanced features for county-wide voice or text alerts to the public about natural disasters, hazardous situations, and any number of crisis communications. HipLink is currently in use by several agencies for just such purposes.

“From both a management and user perspective, it's just a good product that works as promised. HipLink has really delivered for the Sheriff's Department.”

— Director of IT Operations



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