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Tennessee Sheriff's Office Significantly Improves Service of Arrest Warrants through Real-time Incarceration Alerts

Challenge

Serving arrest warrants was an inefficient, manual process that drained CCSO resources with limited success, while compromising officer safety.

Solution

Access to real-time national booking information, including biographical information, charges, and photographs of offenders.

Benefit

CCSO receives real-time alerts when a wanted person is booked into custody nearly anywhere in the U.S.

Background

The Carter County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) serves the roughly 60,000 citizens in this northeastern Tennessee county – a jurisdiction of 350 square miles. Though CCSO is focused on its home county, deputies understood that hundreds – even thousands – of fugitives wanted for crimes committed outside of Carter County were able to live there without law enforcement's knowledge or operational visibility. They knew that this "transient fugitive" population was likely responsible for many of the property crimes committed in Carter County neighborhoods.

To address this gap in the system, in 2017 CCSO conducted a mission analysis aimed at implementing a strategy to reduce such crimes by identifying the transient fugitives living and hiding in their community. This analysis led the department to a chronic problem that plagues law enforcement agencies across the country: serving arrest warrants. CCSO knew that before any progress could be made, this problem would need to be addressed.

Program Challenges

There are over 7.8 million active criminal warrants in the United States on any given day. Over 1 million of these warrants are for felonies and approximately 100,000 are for serious violent crime. Law enforcement agencies dedicate significant resources to pursue these fugitives and process warrant arrests. These individuals are highly sought after so that they can be held accountable for past crimes – but also because they are viewed as a significant threat to public safety.

In the State of Tennessee, there are approximately 427,000 unserved arrest warrants. The majority of jurisdictions have a similar warrant problem: there are simply too many to properly address with current staffing, funding, and limited information regarding offender whereabouts. CCSO was no different.

Agency Profile
Tennessee County Sheriff's Office

Client Since
2017

Agency Profile
The CCSO protects and serves its citizens in a fair, honest, and professional manner. CCSO seeks to provide the best possible law enforcement to all citizens of Carter County.

Approximately 50% of those wanted in relation to these outstanding warrants are transient, often crossing county and state lines to avoid apprehension. Tennessee had no comprehensive, statewide system for tracking the arrest warrants associated with this population. The capability to share this needed information between counties does not exist. As such, fugitives easily took advantage of this vulnerability.

It is also important to analyze this problem on a national scale, as 35-40% of all U.S. counties share a border with another state. The majority of departments enter felony warrant information into the FBI's NCIC (National Criminal Information Center) database, but felony-based warrants account for just 13% of the warrant population. The process to enter warrants into the NCIC database is manual, extremely time consuming and is therefore rarely completed. (in the case of infectious diseases), and public safety.

Challenges Identified by CCSO When Analyzing Its Warrants Problem Were:

1 Where are they?

2 What do they look like?

3 How do we get the information we need to arrest them?

EXAMPLE:

John Doe is apprehended and incarcerated in County A for driving while intoxicated (DWI). He has an outstanding warrant for shoplifting in County B. But because there is no efficient way for law enforcement in County A to know that John Doe has an outstanding arrest warrant in a neighboring county, he posts bond and is released from custody. Had there been an information-sharing system in place, County B would receive an alert that John Doe – someone they had been looking for – was booked into custody in County A. From there, County B could collect the fugitive and he would face his shoplifting charges.

CCSO deputies were spending a great deal of time pursuing offenders in order to serve warrants, albeit with very little information. And, at the time of their 2017 analysis, roughly 50% of its warrants were for those living outside of Carter County. These efforts were a drain on department resources and on officer safety threat. But, without a way to share this information between counties, this inefficient process would continue.

In Search of a Solution

Fully understanding its "warrants problem," and how it tied to their original goal of reducing crime committed by transient fugitives, the department took action. CCSO turned to its Criminal Intel Investigator who was familiar with the Tennessee SAVIN (Statewide Automated Victim Information Notification) program. The SAVIN program was implemented in Tennessee to increase the safety of victims, law enforcement, criminal justice personnel, and the general public by providing access to timely offender custody status information. Victims and concerned citizens can register to be notified when an offender's custody status changes.

Tennessee SAVIN is provided by TotalVerify through its nationwide VINE (Victim Information and Notification Everyday) platform. TotalVerify operates the most comprehensive incarceration data network, interfacing with over 2,000 jails and DOC facilities across the nation. Rather than requiring jail and prison staff to input data into an additional system, TotalVerify directly connects with each facility's jail management system to pull the most recent booking data, as frequently as every 15 minutes.

TotalVerify receives real-time incarceration information from over 85% of U.S. incarceration facilities (and 100% of Tennessee jails). CCSO knew this information would help them immensely in their efforts to better-control their warrants problem.

During exploratory discussions, CCSO learned that TotalVerify offered a specific tool for law enforcement, built from VINE data: Justice Intelligence. Justice Intelligence is a secure web portal that provides access to an instant, up-to-date database of current and historical booking information, including biographical information, charges, and photographs of offenders. Justice Intelligence includes a feature that allows law enforcement agencies to place "watches" on persons of interest. When any "watched" person is booked into jail, the department receives an automated alert – that includes the facility name and location, among other details – within minutes.

Justice Intelligence in Action

TotalVerify linked CCSO's unserved arrest warrant list to its real-time incarceration database. This created an ongoing "Watch List," whereby CCSO is alerted via email anytime an individual on the list is booked into custody across the U.S. This alert allows CCSO to place a detainer on the wanted individual wherever they are incarcerated. Deputies are then able to transport the individual back to Carter County.

CCSO and TotalVerify launched the department's Justice Intelligence program in 2017 with four goals:

- Improve arrest warrant service on wanted persons residing outside Carter County
- Place 200 detainers on wanted persons over one year using Watch List functionality
- Reduce CCSO's "time to arrest" metric (i.e., "days on the run")
- Assess the number of times the wanted person was arrested and booked without CCSO's notification prior to detainer placement/Watch List solution

Continuous Monitoring of Wanted Persons

With Justice Intelligence, CCSO receives alerts whenever a watched person is booked into custody. This capability has transformed the way CCSO handles warrants and has reduced its warrant-related workloads by 30-35%.

Warrant Issued
Warrant issued for John Doe in County A and placed under watch.

Booked into Jail
John Doe is arrested and booked into jail in County B.

Arrest Alert
County A made aware of arrest in County B.

Detainer Placed
John Doe is detained by County B jail.

Inmate Transferred
John Doe is collected from County B to face charges in County A.

The Results

Justice Intelligence has allowed CCSO to vastly exceed its initial goals, helping to significantly reduce the warrant problem in Carter County.

The first day that the solution was deployed in Carter County, 120 detainers were placed on individuals that were incarcerated in other jurisdictions. Within the first 16 weeks, the system facilitated the arrest and detention of 274 wanted persons located across 17 jurisdictions and five states. These 274 persons were served a total of 393 arrest warrants, accounting for 38% of CCSO's total arrest warrant service.

During the first year using Justice Intelligence in Carter County, 803 wanted persons were detained and 1,105 arrest warrants were served (CCSO maintained an average of 1,216 wanted persons in its database). The second year using the service saw near-identical results. Now in its third year, this solution is now responsible for the service of over 30% of CCSO's arrest warrants.

The solution has reduced workloads associated with serving warrants by 30-35%. Officers are no longer fruitlessly knocking on doors; warrant service is now deliberate, targeted, and tactical. This saves time, stress, and money on behalf of the department and its staff.

Importantly, Justice Intelligence bolsters officer safety. CCSO is now able to collect wanted persons from other incarceration facilities – where they have already been sanitized. Officers do not carry the risk of collecting individuals from homes or off the street. This solution also positively impacts public safety, as transient fugitives aren't as easily able to go unnoticed in the community. During the first year, the number of crimes reported in Carter County decreased by 29%, supporting CCSO's original goal of increasing public safety through decreasing crimes committed by this population.

Finally, in addition to those benefits listed above, Justice Intelligence protects and empowers the victims associated with these crimes. With each warrant issued, there is a victim on the other side – without justice, likely living in fear. When a warrant is served, and an offender is brought to justice, that victim can get closure, possible restitution, and most importantly, a sense of safety that he or she deserves.

With an efficient, effective warrants solution in place, the CCSO is able to better uphold their mission of protecting and serving the people of Carter County, and beyond.

> **"I arrested a man wanted in Carter County after receiving an alert that he had been booked into another county jail. I told the jail staff there that he had several misdemeanor and felony warrants outstanding, and that some were at least four years old. The jailer pulled up the man's arrest history, and records showed him booked into that facility 16 times over the previous four years. Without Justice Intelligence, I have little doubt that this man would have been booked out of this jail without Carter County ever knowing he was in custody."**
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> **– Lt. Larry Vaughn, CCSO**

Footnotes

1 State Progress in Record Reporting for Firearm-Related Background Checks: Fugitives from Justice; Prepared by Dennis DeBacco of SEARCH and Richard Schauffler of the National Center for State Courts

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