

Number 54, Fall/Winter 2008

By Eldon Amoroso, Paul Kerkhof and Case Huysmans, London Police Service

myVersadex

Background

Years ago, customizable browser-based applications started becoming popular. Why? People wanted more flexibility to quickly and easily access information that was of interest to them. The information would be constantly updated and you could change the look as well. Information was “pushed” to the viewer based on the viewer’s needs or wants, rather than the viewer having to query a number of sites to pull information together.

This customizable browser concept, or the “myVersadex” concept, was first presented at the Versaterm conference 3 years ago in Ogden, to rave reviews from the Versaterm community. The demand was there so Versaterm set about to find a suitable tool kit with which to develop the product.

London started implementing a pilot project with the Beta version of myVersadex in the early spring of 2008. The first draft of the product includes near real time views of what is happening (London updates the view every 10 minutes). As information is entered into Records, defined views are updated for the users and the new information presented. The reports or Applets, as they are called, are fully customizable and reflect the particular user’s view of what is important. The user merely signs on with his or her Versaterm Records account, and the system displays their customized view of the world.

London’s Approach

London started fairly slowly in the rollout of myVersadex. There were a couple of things going on that contributed to the effort however. We had a small committee set up to develop the Crime Analysis capabilities of the Versadex Datamart and Cognos tools and so we were already looking at available data and the best way to apply it to our policing situation. This assisted us with myVersadex by helping us focus on what was important to our organization.

Criteria:	Last 24 Hours
As of:	0433
Spatial:	Alpha Sector
Calls for Service:	1 950/144 500
% Offense Reports:	30%/35%
Traffic Stops:	351/79 550

1

*The best public safety software...
but don't just listen to us, listen to our clients - we do!*



VERSATERM

2300 Carling Avenue Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K2B 7G1

PHONE: 613-820-0311 FAX: 613-596-5884

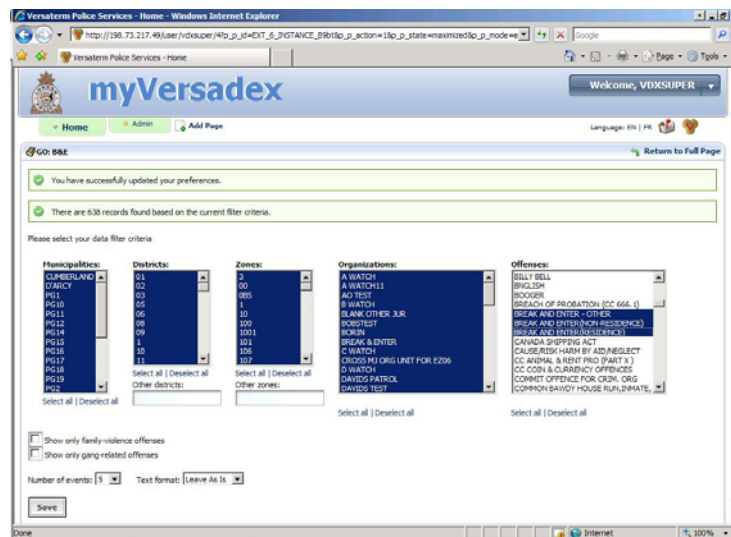
EMAIL: info@versaterm.com www.versaterm.com



As an example, in September, London has a huge number of students returning to the local College and University. At times things get somewhat unruly during September and October as some students experience living away from home for the first time (by November the students settle down as the weather gets colder and the chilly reality of mid-term marks begins to set in). Each August we now set up Project LEARN, a special project to manage the issues with rowdy parties, liquor violations, vandalism, and so on. This year we set up a secondary UCR code for Project Learn occurrences and myVersadex provided near-instant access to those who needed to closely monitor the results of the project.

The results are not just limited to occurrences but could include tickets, street checks, complaints, BOLO, and so on.

Results can be further filtered by additional criteria such as municipality, districts, zones, and other fields. For RMS events, users also have the ability to drill down to query mode to view the full report details. As well, customized reports providing graphical data can be viewed within myVersadex. Customized reports can be run that provide graphical data that can be viewed within myVersadex. Also, with RMS information users can drill down to view the full report on the RMS. So there is excellent flexibility in what you can show and devise with easy-to-design applets. While the focus is clearly operational, we are currently looking at what can be produced for monitoring budgets, the status of overdue follow-ups, and so on. There are many potential uses for myVersadex on the administrative side of the organization as well as the operational.



There are some prerequisites for using myVersadex. Security to allow Browser pop-ups needs to be configured, but don't worry – this can be configured to allow pop-ups for this site only. The organization also needs the VCAP (Crime Analysis) database to be installed, but the full Cognos suite is not required. Finally, LDAP is required because it is used for the myVersadex sign on (user authentication).

The advantage of myVersadex is that you have full control over the content and look of the information presented to the users and the user does not have to run browser queries to receive the information they require to do their job. It is presented to them in a concise and customized view.

The Real World

Detective Sergeant Paul Kerkhof is responsible for the General Investigations Section within the Criminal Investigation Division of the London Police Service. His Section is responsible for investigating Break and Enters, Auto Thefts, Arsons, Robberies, Youth Crimes, Hate Crimes, and for the activities of the Crime Analysts.

Paul, a self-proclaimed "stats geek", got involved because he could see the advantage of having relevant information immediately available and the organization was already examining a recent increase in auto theft. The accountability of knowing that the Deputy Chief was carefully reviewing Auto Thefts made it important for Paul to be current with what was happening in the city. myVersadex was the perfect tool to provide this insight.

Paul states that, "with one keystroke you can have available most of the information you need". His myVersadex screen shows, among other things, the last 10 B&Es, Auto Thefts, and Robberies. And from the myVersadex screen you can link right to the actual occurrence in the RMS.

***The best public safety software...
but don't just listen to us, listen to our clients - we do!***

2



VERSATERM

2300 Carling Avenue Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K2B 7G1

PHONE: 613-820-0311 FAX: 613-596-5884

EMAIL: info@versaterm.com www.versaterm.com



He found that the 10 minute update was important to making the information relevant. As occurrences appear on the list, he can do a quick audit. This has proved extremely valuable because most patrol sections are staffed with young officers with limited investigative skill or experience. Paul can therefore critique the report for training purposes, but more importantly can send an email or contact the officer immediately and have the officer pursue the missing investigative components while they are still on the street and the investigation is in mind.

Paul believes that such access to information assists in the early detection of crime patterns and MO issues. As a result, he can direct a quicker response from the Detectives in his section on an emerging or connected matter. Prior to myVersadex, he would get “today’s reports tomorrow”, at best. Now we can get them within 10 minutes of submission.

He comments that myVersadex gives him “a quick visual link between Auto Thefts, Break and Enters and Robberies”. It allows him to respond to things as they happen as opposed to days or weeks later. Finally, he points to the power of knowledge like this and provides one caution. With such powerful and immediate access to information there may be a temptation to micromanage those who report to you. However, he feels that we can provide more timely and responsive investigative responses without micromanaging. He concludes by saying that it is like any other tool he has ever used in the sense that “like anything you have to make it work for you”.

Observations and Thoughts

myVersadex is an outstanding tool and it is serving the needs of the London Police Service. It allows you to push current and focused information to the person who needs that exact information. But like any other tool that you provide, some will use it extensively and effectively but others will not. While many supervisors are ecstatic to receive focused and current information, others may be more involved in the day to day grind and do not see the same advantage. Some do not so acutely see the need to manage the situation but see their involvement as more reactive than proactive. Therefore, we believe that myVersadex is best implemented in conjunction with an initiative to increase the accountability of the people who are receiving the information. A Compstat or modified Compstat approach benefits the organization by placing accountability on the supervisor who is responsible for that area. It assumes that the responsible supervisor should be able to speak about where the trend is going, what may be causing the trend, and what they will do to attack the problem. In that kind of environment, myVersadex becomes an absolute lifeline that keeps the supervisor up to date and able to answer the questions that they will inevitably be asked. However, if the organization tends to be more reactive and less proactive, then myVersadex will not appear to be as critical.

We are also looking at other uses for myVersadex since the reports shown do not necessarily have to be tied to RMS-based information. What if we could produce a report on overdue follow-ups in each section and have it displayed to the appropriate Division Commander? Would that assist in creating an awareness of what is being done, or not being done, by each functional area? Or could the administrative people benefit by seeing some sort of budget reports in myVersadex? We have a feeling that people will come up with many imaginative uses for myVersadex that will go beyond the operational thrust of the original idea.

We are very pleased with our pilot implementation of myVersadex and we look forward to rolling it out to many more desktops in our organization. myVersadex is definitely here to stay.

As far as future developments, there are some “creature comfort” features that would enhance the ease of setting up new users. For example, it would be good to have the ability to copy an existing myVersadex account when setting up a new account because, at times, there are similarities in what end users require. Also, some information is more confidential in nature and it would be excellent to have the ability to restrict certain reports by user. However, these have not proved to be major issues and we are continuing with our implementation.

Conclusion

myVersadex is an excellent tool and is very focused on providing precise and timely information to those who need it. We can take our organizations to new levels of performance by enhancing available information and making people accountable for results. This does not have to resemble Roman Gladiators but can be done in a controlled and sane way so as to show the importance of working for results. Before implementing myVersadex, plan carefully to engage the users who will take advantage of its full potential and will be a beacon for others. If implemented in this manner, your organization will benefit greatly from this information innovation.

*The best public safety software...
but don't just listen to us, listen to our clients - we do!*

3



VERSATERM

2300 Carling Avenue Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K2B 7G1

PHONE: 613-820-0311 FAX: 613-596-5884

EMAIL: info@versaterm.com www.versaterm.com

