

San Diego County DA's Office Enhances Victim Care Approach with CommunityConnect

26,374

texts sent¹

7,642

domestic violence
victims sent texts

86%

of Victim Services Texts delivered
successfully to mobile numbers
or email addresses

Challenge

The San Diego County DA (SDCDA) sought to enhance communications with domestic violence (DV) victims about the status of their cases. The SDCDA had traditionally communicated with DV victims primarily by telephone or letter but wasn't able to reach all victims through these approaches, and when contacts were made, they sometimes involved unavoidable delays. The SDCDA wanted to be able to automate communication with victims in a modern, digital, real-time format, as well as be able to provide victims with detailed, written resources that would remain accessible to them on their phones.

About the San Diego County District Attorney's Office

The San Diego County DA's Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases annually and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs.

¹ San Diego County DA went through a phased deployment of Versaterm's CommunityConnect; the data reflects the following timeframes by location: texting in North County from 8/9/21 through 3/12/23; East County and Central from 3/15/22 through 3/12/23; and South County from 10/11/22-3/12/23.

Solution

The San Diego County District Attorney's (SDCDA) office researched the use of texting by other criminal justice organizations and public health agencies. The objective was to determine the effectiveness of using texting to improve outcomes. This research provided the SDCDA with helpful background information on implementing these types of programs.

The SDCDA selected Versaterm CommunityConnect platform to help introduce automation to its domestic violence victim notification process and expand communications. The solution was designed to provide public safety agencies with the same tools the private sector employs to satisfy the modern consumer's service expectations. As demonstrated in the private sector, a positive experience also tends to improve the public perception of that organization.

For the SDCDA, the Victim Acknowledgement capability of CommunityConnect's Investigations Function sends customized templated messages based on the case workflows in their case management system (CMS), such as the assignment of a DA to a case, the decision on whether to prosecute a case, and the date of arraignment, if applicable. These email and text communications were drafted and approved by the SDCDA before the launch.

The solution was implemented with domain white labelling, which allows for fully branded SDCDA links, texts, and emails that help ensure better open rates and access to important information, such as resources and prosecution decisions. This transparency fosters trust between the agency and those it serves.



Key Outcomes

The platform launched at the end of 2021 and enabled the agency to communicate and engage with more domestic violence (DV) victims. Prior to implementing texting, the SDCDA was only able to reach 80% of DV victims through traditional communication methods; the addition of texting and emailing brought that number up to nearly 100%.

The communications contain not only case notification updates but links to additional resources, such as those posted at the text support website (sdcdal.org), which is available in both English and Spanish. More than 30% of victims sent texts have visited this website, which describes free services offered to victims by SDCDA advocates, provides an extensive listing of community-based resources in San Diego County, and answers frequently asked questions. Nearly 90% of DV victims who accessed the site did so on a mobile device; 6% viewed the Spanish language version.

The SDCDA surveyed DV victims about their perception of the agency when the DA's Office declined to prosecute their case. In an A/B test, respondents who were also sent the Case Not Filed text message rated the DA's Office higher on whether the office was helpful in keeping them informed than those contacted only in traditional ways (phone call, letter). Specifically, 90% of those victims also sent texts indicated the DA's Office was helpful keeping them informed vs. 77% not sent texts. This was a 13% point (positive) difference between these two groups.

These automated and customized texts and emails fill an important communications gap for DV victims, particularly Millennials and members of Generation Z, who would often rather text than talk. The program enables victims to receive information about their case status quickly and in a format they prefer. The notifications also help ensure victims receive important updates about their cases, as well as links to other helpful information, such as how to be notified about changes to an abuser's custody status. The CommunityConnect platform enables the SDCDA to provide this service without adding to the workload of its staff. The solution can also improve trust between the agency and victims by creating more positive experiences between them.



The agency now sends the below texts to DV victims:

- Introduction to Victim Services
- Customized Victim Services
- Case Assigned to a DA
- Case Filed or Case Not Filed
- Case Filed Follow Up