

Washington County Sheriff's Office Adopts Versaterm Visual Labs Body Camera Solution

135

smartphones for patrol,
courts, jail and
water/parks/trails deputies

45

days to complete all
personnel training and
device configurations

260,000+

population of Washington
County, Minnesota

Challenge

Washington County Sheriff's Office (WCSO) had issued deputies digital cameras and audio recorders. They also received a cellular phone stipend for use of their personal phone while on duty. The agency had in-vehicle cameras, but had not implemented a body-worn camera program.

In their search for a body camera system, Washington County looked for a multi-functional tool that would allow their deputies to carry less equipment. Commander Andrew Ellickson led the nine-officer study group and oversaw the research and evaluation of a variety of camera systems.

"We evaluated a lot of different systems," Ellickson said. "Once we found this, we knew that was the direction we wanted to go."

About the Washington County Sheriff's Office

Washington County, Minnesota is located just east of Minneapolis-St. Paul. It has a population of 250,000 and a land area of 423 square miles. Since 2017, the Washington County Sheriff's Office (WCSO) has been led by Sheriff Dan Starry, who has been with the agency for nearly 25 years.



Sheriff Dan Starry

Solution

The Versaterm Visual Labs system harnesses off-the-shelf Android smartphones and cellular connectivity to create a connected, all-in-one solution. As such, no additional hardware such as external routers or docking stations are required. The Versaterm Visual Labs Android application enables the smartphone to capture courtroom-ready evidence in the form of body-worn camera video, still photographs and audio recordings. The footage is securely and automatically uploaded from the field to the Versaterm Visual Labs platform where it can be accessed within minutes.

THE DEVICE

The department chose to issue 135 Kyocera Brigadiers connected to the Verizon network for the initial deployment. WSCO chose the Brigadier for its:

- Durability - the Brigadier has an IP68 rating for its resistance to water and dust, and meets the MIL-81 0G standard for surviving impact, shock, humidity and extreme temperature.
- Programmable Buttons - specific buttons on the device are designated for initiating and terminating video recording, as well as adding bookmarks to footage while recording video and audio.

IMPLEMENTATION

Versaterm Visual Labs led an in-person, train-the-trainer session with WSCO staff members. Later that same day, deputies began using the system on patrol. Within 45 days, all deputies had been trained and all 135 devices had been configured with a MDM program and deployed in the field.

WSCO kept all stakeholders involved during the implementation of this project. Community members were given the opportunity to submit questions and provide input to the Sheriff's Office at a public hearing, and the Agency's union was included in the discussions of policy, how the data would be used and how members' privacy would be protected. Union Vice-President Corporal Mark Caroon said, "There wasn't any pushback here. Officers want to do the right thing. You'll have proof of it."

"OUR VISION WAS TO FIND A BODY WORN CAMERA SYSTEM THAT WOULD MAKE US A LEADER IN TECHNOLOGY FOR THE AREA, WHILE MEETING THE PUBLIC'S EXPECTATIONS IN A COST-EFFECTIVE MANNER."

-Sheriff Dan Starry

Key Outcomes

AFFORDABILITY

The costs to the department are shown below.

Negligible Upfront Costs:

- Devices: By activating new lines of service with Verizon, Washington County received the Kyocera Brigadiers free of charge. In addition, due to a Verizon incentive program in place at the time, WCSO received a Verizon service credit, roughly equal to three months of free service for each device.

Low Recurring Costs:

- Cellular Service: WCSO selected Verizon due to its strong coverage in the area. The cellular connectivity and unlimited data plan allow for footage to be automatically uploaded from the field, for dispatchers to locate all active deputies in the field and for video to be livestreamed in emergency situations.
- Versaterm Visual Labs Software: The license combines the Android application with an advanced web-backend. The cost is a flat monthly price per device which includes CHS-compliant cloud storage of footage, an interface for annotating, tagging and sharing footage as well as use of the Android application.

Cost Savings:

- With the Versaterm Visual Labs system, WCSO was able to discontinue the issuance of separate digital cameras and audio recorders. Due to the swift and secure nature of finding and sharing footage, they were able to abandon their old practice of burning evidence to DVDs, which saved both cost and many man-hours.

No hidden fees, no long-term commitment:

- Versaterm Visual Labs does not charge fees for downloading footage or for use by records staff or district attorneys

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

The Versaterm Visual Labs system also provides a map showing the location of every on-duty deputy, which aids dispatch and is key for officer safety. That location data can also be analyzed to generate heatmaps and analyze time spent in geofences. WCSO uses these tools to provide an overview of how resources are being allocated to their contract cities.