



CASESTUDY

Better Policing Through Workforce Enablement

How AssetTracer and KeyTracer Streamlined
Operations at San Mateo County Sheriff's Office

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Introduction

Law enforcement is challenging. You never know what the day is going to bring. Law enforcement personnel need to be ready for anything from traffic stops to domestic disturbances, medical emergencies, and violent crime.

Unpredictable jobs require many different tools. That is certainly true of law enforcement, where personnel rely on a broad range of equipment in their day-to-day jobs. And the larger your agency, and the more hats your personnel are asked to wear any given day, the more equipment you need on hand.

The deputies and other law enforcement personnel of the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office certainly have many hats to wear. And as you can imagine, they also have a large amount of police gear they need to manage across a large, fast-moving organization.

The San Mateo County (SMC) Sheriff's Office decided they needed a smart solution to streamline how they managed their equipment, fleet keys, and weapons. This case study explores how the Operations Support Division at the SMC Sheriff's Office rolled out AssetTracer and KeyTracer systems from Real Time Networks to automate that work.

“ *Manual tracking wasn't working. Deputies at every bureau simply had too much gear coming and going every day for us to keep tabs on it all effectively.* ”



Lt. Andrew Hui

Operations Group,
San Mateo County
Sheriff's Office



The SMC Sheriff's Office Faced Many Challenges



San Mateo County, California, is one of nine counties bordering the San Francisco Bay and covers most of the southern San Francisco Peninsula. It is a diverse region with a population of over 750,000. From Daly City and the San Francisco International Airport in the north to busy Redwood City and Menlo Park in the east at the heart of Silicon Valley, all the way to the more rural and isolated Coastsides where the Sheriff's Office has substations in Moss Beach and Half Moon Bay along the Pacific Ocean.

The San Mateo County Sheriff's Office is one of the oldest in the state of California, founded in 1856. It has grown a great deal in that long history and today has over 800 personnel working in seven different divisions. The Sheriff's Office headquarters is located in Redwood City. In addition, it has five other bureaus located throughout the County.

The Sheriff's Office had always been busy. But as the Covid-19 pandemic brought sweeping lockdowns, new social problems, and changes to how everyone on the planet lived and worked, the scope of its responsibilities increased drastically. As a result, the Sheriff's Office also found itself managing a growing inventory of police gear and other equipment. In early 2021, one of the people at the Sheriff's Office who recognized the need for better equipment management was Lieutenant Andrew Hui of the SMC Sheriff's Office Operations Group.

"Manual tracking wasn't working. Deputies at every bureau simply had too much gear coming and going every day for us to keep tabs on it all effectively," Lt. Hui said. "It was a matter of accountability too. We didn't want personnel going out on a call missing one important item. Or have a car not ready when someone needs it."



The Growing Problem of Equipment Management

The SMC Sheriff's Office had to cover a large and varied jurisdiction. Its organization was equally large and varied, which created some interesting challenges regarding equipment management.

They had over 300 deputies, sergeants, and other personnel signing equipment in and out regularly. And no two stations needed the same type of equipment management. The beachfront communities along the Pacific coast of San Mateo County had very different policing needs to residential Daly City or either of them to the urban Silicon Valley communities.

At most of their stations, gear bags sat on open shelves. Vehicle keys just hung on pegs boards next to a paper signout sheet. So if a deputy forgot to log something missing when they returned a kit, the next person to sign it out likely wouldn't catch it until they were halfway through their shift.

It didn't make sense for Lt. Hui, or anyone else in the Operations Group, to establish complete central control over all police equipment management in the County. However, they still needed to know what was happening at every station. Were all long guns accounted for at Half Moon Beach? Was the North County Bureau running low on narcotics test kits? Getting that data in close to real time required automation. Otherwise, they would be pulling personnel away from actual law enforcement work for manual administrative logging.

“ *It was about workforce enablement, We needed a system that made their lives easier, rather than adding a layer of busy work just so the Operations Group got the reporting it needed.* ”



Lt. Andrew Hui

Operations Group,
San Mateo County
Sheriff's Office

Solution Requirements

In April 2021, the SMC Sheriff's Office put out a request for proposals for an "equipment inventory control system."

“

We needed an automated solution. One that gave us the data on what was happening at each bureau, but one that still gave the bureaus enough local control to manage their day-to-day ops.

”



Lt. Andrew Hui

*Operations Group,
San Mateo County
Sheriff's Office*

They asked for a control system that they could customize to fit storage needs at the stations in each of their five bureaus and their headquarters in Redwood City. The storage cabinets needed to accommodate all police gear deputies took on patrol and parking enforcement. The lockers needed to be self-service, so the Sheriff's Office didn't need dedicated equipment managers at each station. They also optionally wanted a system that could track long guns, which weren't assigned to individual deputies, as well as their vehicle keys.



Ticketing handhelds needed special management

One of Lt. Hui's specific needs in a management system was a way to track fault codes in their traffic enforcement handheld devices. His deputies used these handhelds to scan driver's licenses, take voice recordings, take photos, and print citations.

"The [ticketing] devices are great, but like any electronics, they break down," Hui explained. "We didn't have a reliable way to know when that happened." A deputy might return from patrol with a broken device and tell someone about it who forgot, or just drop it off in a storage locker, and then the next shift would be down a device, often without knowing it in advance.



Two-factor authentication

Lt. Hui and the rest of the Operations Group weren't sure whether they could find a vendor that offered it, but they also wanted two-factor authentication in their equipment control system.

Two-factor authentication is when a user must present two credentials when authorizing themselves. So, for example, when a website asks you for a password and then sends a PIN code to your registered phone number, that is two-factor authentication.

With their requirements in place, the Operations Group sent out their RFP. A few weeks later, they selected a combined AssetTracer and KeyTracer system from Real Time Networks as their smart management system of choice.

Implementing the RTN Solution

Despite Covid restrictions, Real Time Networks worked with the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office and was able to safely send personnel to oversee the installation of their AssetTracer and KeyTracer lockers on site. "It was a really collaborative process from the RFP onward," Lt. Hui said.

RTN staff visited each station to assess how the installations could proceed. They collected details on station floor plans, electric wiring, and other design constraints. They sent detailed notes to RTN engineers on the power consumption of the ticketing handhelds and other electronic devices and dimensions on other vital equipment, including San Mateo's long guns.

"It was a really collaborative process [working with Real Time Networks]."



Lt. Andrew Hui

Operations Group,
San Mateo County
Sheriff's Office

Lt. Hui worked with Lee Purvis, Real Time Networks' CTO and project lead, to ensure the system met their fault tracking and reporting needs. "San Mateo needed central management to happen from headquarters, but distribution to happen locally," Lee said. They also wanted reporting available locally, for sergeants and administrators within each bureau, and at headquarters.

"San Mateo had a mixed set of reporting needs. We could meet some with off-the-shelf reports. Others required some modifications for their unique needs." Lee also met Lt. Hui's request for two-factor authentication using a swipe card plus PIN code combination.

Deployment hiccups needed to be overcome

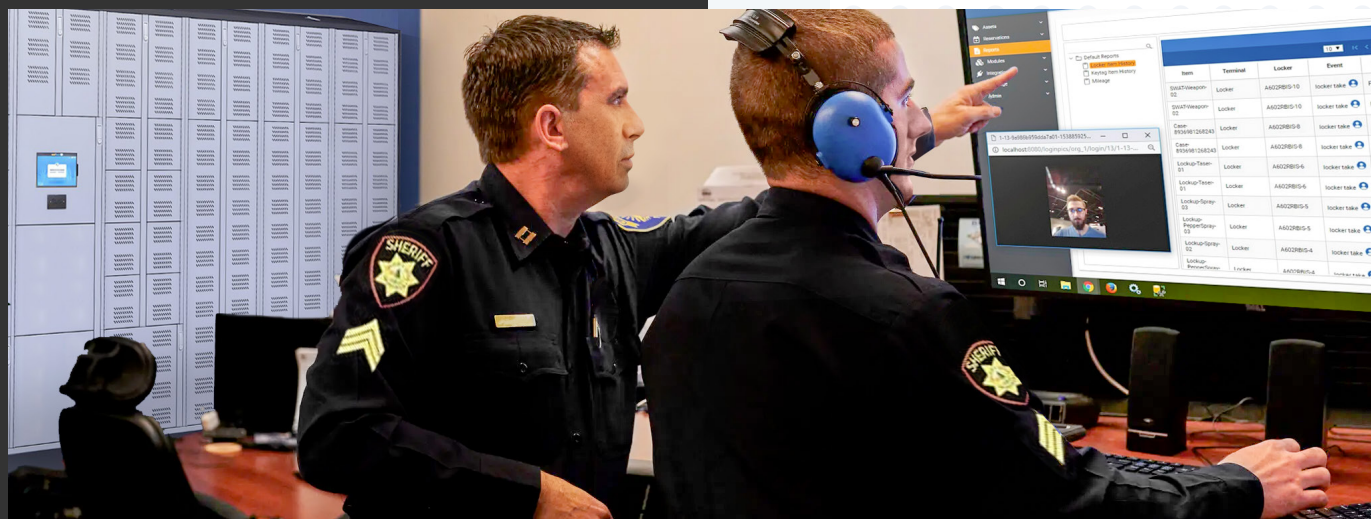
As with most major projects, it wasn't all smooth sailing. For example, due to a scheduling conflict, one of the bureaus underwent a remodeling project right before their locker system was due to be installed by Lee Purvis' team. But they were able to adapt the rollout schedule at that bureau without adversely affecting the wider deployment of the SMC Sheriff's Office.

"I didn't realize it would be so easy to access everything."



Sgt. Patrick Taylor

Operations Group,
San Mateo County
Sheriff's Office



Outcome: Better Workforce Enablement

With the locker system in place, deputies could sign out the equipment they needed at the start of every shift. In addition, the lockers provided content surveillance on each asset stored within a kit, so if someone didn't sign out or return everything they needed, the system would issue an alert.

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It was very easy working with Real Time Networks to develop the program into what we wanted from start to finish, It was very collaborative. Everything we asked for, we got.

”



Lt. Andrew Hui

*Operations Group,
San Mateo County
Sheriff's Office*

Sgt. Patrick Taylor, one of the main administrators of San Mateo's new locker system, agreed. "I didn't realize it would be so easy to access everything."

The number one benefit that Sgt. Taylor and Lt. Hui saw was increased accountability. Before, deputies signed out equipment basically on an honor system. But now, the AssetTracer system gave them detailed reports about who signed out which critical assets and when. As a result, the Sheriff's Office had better insight into when and where deputies used their paper citation books, fleet keys, and radar and lidar kits.





The benefits of networked lockers

The AssetTracer system also provided critical fault tracking on important electronic devices. In particular, the Sheriff's Office wanted to know when handheld ticketing devices needed repair. Previously, they would only know a handheld was broken if an officer or deputy remembered to tell a supervisor. Now, the AssetTracer system prompted them to log any issues signing a handheld back into the locker, so nothing was ever missed. In addition, their AssetTracer system sends a daily report to supervisors, waiting in their inbox first thing in the morning so they would know immediately if a ticketing handheld or other item wasn't working properly.

The same went for fleet keys managed by the attached KeyTracer cabinet. If a vehicle needed servicing, the deputy could report it when they returned a key. The entire signout and return process was fully automated, freeing up staff and providing better workforce enablement for the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office personnel.

Sgt. Taylor noted that they could now also compare reports across the entire Sheriff's Office, which was very difficult before, given how far apart their different bureaus were. AssetTracer helped them identify patterns in critical faults they hadn't seen prior.



Better policing through customized workflows

Sgt. Taylor was especially grateful for the AssetTracer remote unlock feature, which allows an authorized supervisor to unlock storage compartments through a secure web connection remotely. For example, he noted one weekend when he got a call at home from a technician who wanted to repair handheld devices at a remote bureau. Instead of driving an hour into the office, Taylor simply remotely unlocked the compartments for the broken handheld ticketing devices, and both he and the technician were able to get on with their day.

Real Time Networks products are bespoke systems designed to be customized for each worksite. The San Mateo County Sheriff's Office saw this as a major benefit. At first, they were skeptical but very pleased with RTN's responsiveness to customization requests. "Everything we asked for to be added or fixed we had in a short amount of time," Sgt. Taylor said. "The customer support is fantastic. Everyone's getting back to me when I need something."

The RTN systems enabled the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office workforce to do their jobs better. It didn't force unnecessary changes into police operations. It made the way they already worked even better.



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