

Case Study



Hamilton County Sheriff, Indiana

Facing Stringent Budgeting Scrutiny, Meticulous Cost-Benefit Analysis by Indiana's Hamilton County Sheriff's Office Proves Value of L-3 Mobile-Vision Digital Video

Hamilton County Indiana is the 23rd fastest growing county in the nation with 300 officers serving a population of 250,000, a population that promises to grow by more than 50% in the next 10 years. With that growth comes greater scrutiny and accountability for the Sheriff's Office. Video evidence capture, coupled with a verifiable chain of custody plays a key part in documenting arrests and in resolving citizen complaints.

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Background

Upgrading HCSO's in-car video systems was a must. Their existing 8mm and VHS systems were breaking down regularly and many had stopped working altogether. Countless hours and dollars were being spent repairing and sending off video units for service, not to mention the enormous labor costs associated with manually tagging, storing and retrieving video tapes.

Solution

Subsequently L-3 Mobile-Vision installed FLASHBACK™, their wireless digital video solution, into 53 HCSO mobile units. The solution consisted of L-3's FLASHBACK™ DVR, a lightweight, compact, digital video recorder that records to solid-state flash memory. The removable CF card can store between 8 and 12 hours of evidence. Additionally the system includes the patented VoiceLink Plus™ wireless microphone and Nite-Watch™, L-3's compact and powerful forward facing camera. The system can be activated manually or automatically based on preset protocols (such as activating the wireless microphone, light bar, siren, or from two available auxiliary inputs).

"What is most important to us is that our video capture solution is efficient and effective for the officers who use it," says Sheriff Doug Carter, chief officer of HCSO responsible for leading the department's growth in a way that meets the changing needs of line officers and the citizens they serve. "Our old systems were difficult to operate with a long learning curve. L-3 Mobile Vision's Flashback system records events completely automatically, leaving our officers free to focus on the events at hand."

"The L-3 system could not be much easier to use," adds Sgt. Dennis Quakenbush, a field supervisor, who uses the video system daily. "There are no video tapes to hassle with. The Flashback unit starts recording when I activate my emergency lights, and I just push a button to stop it." Adding to "ease of use" capabilities, L-3 implemented Intelligent Wireless Transfer Protocols with their *Digital Evidence Pro*™ management solution to provide automatic data file transfer from in-car systems to the data storage server. Patrol officers need only drive into range of the *wireless hotspots* located within their parking structure to activate download. After the files have been transferred they are verified for accuracy, and then automatically deleted from the vehicles' DVR.

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Solution (contd)

Manual storage of video cassettes was replaced with dedicated RAID servers that store the video digitally. In addition, the L-3 Digital Evidence Pro™ integrated server and software management solution provides a simple, point-and-click interface that enables users to access, manage and build multi-media case files in minutes. Files are accessed via a standard PC connected to the department's Local Area Network (LAN). Secure access is managed by the system administrator, and the integrated software system itself creates a "Chain of Custody" report that details all activity for a video or case file.

Results

Sheriff Doug Carter can attest to the positive impact both department-wide and personally. Like all law enforcement agencies, HCSO sometimes receives complaints from citizens. "The L-3 Mobile-Vision system has brought a whole new level of accountability to our patrol officers as well as the people we serve," says Carter. "With real-time access to accurate video and audio footage, we can sit down with the complainant and review the events immediately. In most cases, we resolve the issue without impacting the officer and without affecting the public trust. It's hugely important!"

Sgt. Quakenbush agrees with that, but for him, access and "ease-of-use" are top of mind. "The new L-3 system makes it so I don't have to drive to the sheriff's office, get out of my car, unlock a vault, fill out a label for my video tape, fill out an evidence sheet, get a new tape from the evidence room, and put the new tape back in my car. Now, the video downloads while I'm at roll call or dropping off a prisoner. I tag each recording after the incident. If I make an arrest or need the recording for evidence, I create a video case using the L-3 software, attach my video and I'm done. The new system probably saves me 30 minutes or more a week."

And as a field training officer, Quakenbush has also found big benefits from the L-3 solution. "It is much easier now to record an event, and then to go back to the department and watch the video for training purposes. An example is having a trainee perform sobriety tests on an intoxicated person. After the event is complete, we can watch the video together and critique the event." Adds Quakenbush, "It makes us better at what we do."

"The user-friendly interface and automatic data file transfer capability with reliable solid state flash memory, provided a multitude of cost savings benefits and efficiencies," says Purchasing Agent Ryan Horine. With line officers now able to access and manage their own files instantly, HCSO estimates media technicians save 3-4 hours per week they used to spend tagging, storing and retrieving video tapes. Incidental expenses including video tapes, batteries, and microphone chords have been significantly reduced, and storage space is no longer an issue."

The investment in L-3 Mobile-Vision has paid off in unexpected ways, as well. Says HCSO's Horine, "After uninstalling the L-3 systems, as part of our fleet management practices, we discovered that our vehicles had less damage to them than with the legacy systems. Less damage means our resale value for each unit has increased, which gives us more money to spend on other things."

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