Technology Upgrade for Multi-Agency Dispatching

Marin County Sheriff's Office
California, United States

Located in the San Francisco Bay Area of California, Marin County is home to approximately 250,000 residents. The Marin County Sheriff's Office operates the Marin County Public Safety Communications Center, the primary public safety answering point (PSAP) for most of the county. The center provides service to the sheriff's office, five police departments, nine fire departments, six paramedic service areas, the Marin County Department of Public Works, and other city and county government service providers.

The communications center has experienced many changes in the last few years, including moving to a new, state-of-the-art building. When the sheriff's office also outgrew its computer-aided dispatch (CAD system after 25 years, it searched for a new solution that would meet its growing needs as a regional, multi-agency dispatching center. Finding a system that could accommodate the organization's workflows and information needs proved challenging at first.

"Our previous CAD system eventually did not fit the need for a changing environment, where each police department and fire department might want a specific (system) interface," said Lee Ann Magoski, the sheriff's office communications manager. "We wanted to be a good partner with the agencies we serve. We wanted them to have an easier way to access information, including mapping, mobile data, and – very importantly – information from other systems through interfaces."

Seamless System Integration

The sheriff's office adopted the industry's leading CAD system from Hexagon's Safety & Infrastructure division to support the communications center and responding agencies.

The implementation also includes a powerful in-vehicle field application for mobile dispatching, which enables field units to receive and acknowledge messages, view incident details and maps, and access informational databases.

Marin County selected Hexagon because of the solution's ability to support consolidated systems, operations, and specific agency requirements and workflows, such as the need to seamlessly integrate with multiple third-party law enforcement and fire records management systems (RMS) leveraged by various county and city departments.

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Representative of this dual value was the communications center's ability to consolidate the dispatching operations of Central Marin Police Authority, one of the larger police agencies in the county, while enabling the police department to continue to use its existing RMS.

"This is one of the biggest reasons Central Marin Police Authority was able to join us – because of our selection of Hexagon's CAD system and the interface to their existing records management system," Magoski said.

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Team Building for Success

As the sheriff's department implemented the new system, it was diligent in defining its requirements upfront. The agency worked to incorporate old capabilities into the new solution, while also leveraging the many features it didn't have previously.

The department also assembled a strong core team, which included Hexagon representatives – a key to the project's success.

"You have to build a good relationship with your vendor's project manager," Magoski said. "You need a core team focusing on the project 100%."

The team worked closely with internal stakeholders to meet their needs, which helped with change management as the center and various other agencies transitioned to the new system. Staff training was also a major component of the plan.

The Importance of Location

Beyond the value provided by consolidated operations, Hexagon's CAD system also delivers improved capabilities to the communications center and first responders. These include more effective pinpointing of calls, events, and units on the CAD map.

"In the long term, the ability to make decisions based on mapping will be huge," Magoski said. "The map will be key for Next Generation 911, person-level tracking, and more. We now have many more data points we can search on."

The department encountered a challenge with its mapping vendor during the implementation phase. Hexagon reacted quickly to get a contract in place with another vendor to keep the process on track.

"Hexagon supported us through this transition to keep us going and make sure we had that mapping data," Magoski said. "That challenge was really met on day one when we did not have any issues with our maps or calls for service."

All told, these various efforts ensured a successful cutover to Hexagon's CAD solution. The department later contracted with Hexagon to determine how to evolve the system to meet future needs.

"We've made sure we have tightly integrated systems," Magoski said. "Meshing all of these different capabilities into one system allows the dispatchers to focus on their jobs. We are meeting the needs of our partners in the field and providing the best level of services to the citizens and responders."

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