Contact management – iHub

Using a robotic automated system to reduce time and human resources spent on receiving contact from the public.

First published
19 June 2024

Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Digital, data and analytics Contact management Productivity
Organisation	Kent Police
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Region	South East
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	June 2023
Scale of initiative	Regional

Key details

Target group	General public

Aim

iHub was introduced as an automation product to speed up the transcription of the data into the contact handling system (CHS), free up operator time to review the contact more effectively and to improve the accuracy of transcription.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- provide a faster and more accurate receipt of crime reports via the single online home (SOH)
- improve contact centre operator satisfaction with work

Description

When a member of the public wishes to contact the police to report and make contact about different types of incidents and issues, there are a range of options to do so. These include access via the force website, with most forces using a system called single online home (SOH) to facilitate that contact between the members of the public and the force.

One of the reasons SOH is used is to report a crime. The crime report completed by the member of the public is then transferred to the force via email. The data from the form must then be copied into the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) contact handling system (CHS) in order that it can be recorded as an incident and actioned appropriately.

Usually, the crime report has to be keyed in by hand. To make this process more efficient, forces have automated this in two ways. The first is iHub, a product created by SOH. When deployed, iHub takes the information submitted and allocates a reference number, which is then provided to the person initiating contact. Depending on the processes preferred by the force, the contact will then normally be assessed by staff in the receiving department. When instructed, iHub can create records in appropriate systems meaning that the double keying previously required is eradicated.

iHub also provides a full audit trail as to how the contact was handled.

The change to iHub was easy to make. The process remains largely the same, except now crime reports can be automatically added to force systems. Chief officers were excited about the transition, as they want higher integration between different policing systems.

The second way this process has been optimised is through robotic process automation (RPA), as implemented by the MPS. The MPS bought ten robotic licences which cost £2,500 a year. The process for transcribing the crime report form into the CHS was developed by consultants costing approximately £70,000 for scoping and discovery and £130,000 for phase 2, building the robotic process. The robots are managed by an overseeing system called Orchestrator which can be used to turn the robots onto this process, as required by the demand. The robots went live in December 2018.

The crime forms are allocated to the robots and once the data has been transferred to the CHS, it is sent to an operator for review. The operator determines if it is a crime, checks for risk, identifies the offence, amends the opening code and makes the decision to deploy resources. Alternatively, if the operator determines it is not a crime, a record of the rationale and the actions taken are recorded.

Around 20% of all crime reports to the MPS now come in via the digital route and the work now covered by the robots in transferring this data is estimated to be the equivalent of 15 full time equivalent posts. This frees up significant capacity for the operators to review the contacts and determine appropriate actions required.

Overall impact

Observations and timings have been made and have determined that the robot takes on average 90 seconds less per crime report to transfer the data. Reviews from two forces, Norfolk and Essex, indicate a time per contact saving of between 5.5 to 10 minutes. While no official evaluation has taken place, staff have reported the benefits of having an audit trail, removal of repetitive tasks and human error from data transfer, which has greatly increased productivity. Additionally, the ability to add or remove specific form types from the iHub gives forces further flexibility should new online services be developed in the future, or a form type is identified as more suitable for a command-and-control log.

The robots are an effective intervention if direct integration of the data is not possible. They are around 98% effective. When they break it is generally because a change has been made to the SOH forms that the robots programming has not accounted for.

Learning

iHub is currently being used by Kent Police, Essex Police, Sussex Police and Norfolk Constabulary.

The robotic process automation is made easier because MPS has the secure forms portal and can access the JSON file. If a force only has access to the email with the attached crime report, further programming would be required so that the robot could open the attached file.

Athena Connect challenges

Kent has been experiencing some issues with their records. However, these are mainly due to Athena Connect, the force's record management system. As with most systems of this type, the challenges relate to how the data is submitted. For example, if the person inputting the data replies 'yes' to the question 'do you have a description of the suspect?', and then simply inputs 'male', this can cause duplicated records of 'male' on the system. However, development is in process to improve the system and prevent unnecessary duplicates.

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Tags

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