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CLIENT: WEST MIDLANDS POLICE   **INDUSTRY:** PUBLIC SECTOR   **REGION:** EUROPE

How automation improves policing operations to better serve the community

16
processes automated across eight departments

78,000
transactions directly saving over 18,000 hours (total)

50,000
transactions and 12,000 hours in last 12 months

CLIENT OVERVIEW

West Midlands Police is the second largest police force in the United Kingdom, serving 2.8 million citizens. Every officer, staff member, and software robot have their part to play in preventing crime, protecting its communities, and helping those in need.

Handling over 2,000 emergency calls every day, West Midlands Police sits at the heart of its community. Lending a helping hand, software robots support with a host of back-office processes, allowing police officers to spend more time out in the field

protecting the public.

Policing and paperwork is a delicate balancing act. To combat this challenge, West Midlands Police has introduced software robots into the force to free up time to focus on work that really counts—protecting the community.

To oil the wheels of the force, improving efficiency and experience for its citizens and staff alike, robots have been deployed across shared services, IT and Digital, and operational policing for the past three years.

Introducing the workforce to automation

The team, forming the Centre for Applied Automation at West Midlands Police, was keen to allay employee hesitancy from the outset.

> To establish trust in automation we utilized unattended robots and tackled non-public facing and non-policing challenges in shared services at first.
>
> **Alastair Gregory • Head of Delivery Management, West Midlands Police**

The administration of shift pattern changes in response to flexible working requests was identified as a top candidate for early automation. To streamline the process, the team deployed a bot removing workload from three teams and reducing processing time from 10 business days to 90 minutes.

 More recently, to educate the wider workforce and identify new automation candidates, the team set up a 'race the robots' competition as part of the Chief Constable's roadshow.

> Our employees raced the robot side-by-side to process overtime requests. Off the back of seeing the speed and accuracy in which the robot could function on a manual process which all employees could relate to the pain

of incorrect and delayed processing, we naturally saw hesitance towards automation start to shift to support. The ideas for new candidates also started flooding in.

Gregg Hudson • Mobility and Automation Manager, West Midlands Police

A great effort was also made to humanize automation, with each bot given a name, existing within the HR system, and being searchable in the corporate directory. As a result, employees are encouraged to see the bots as an extension to teams that already exist and ultimately, as colleagues there to bolster their experience.

With the public sector's strict governance and budgeting, top-down support was equally as vital. "The Chief Constable recognized the importance of automation from the outset and understood that if we were to keep maintaining bots, it was better to buy this capability rather than to outsource it. This has allowed our team to quickly expand our project but also ensure that any existing automations continue to run smoothly," Gregory comments.

Going forward, there are plans for the Centre for Applied Automation to support enthusiastic RPA adopters and use them as RPA advocates amongst their colleagues. These business users can contribute their in-depth knowledge of processes while taking over some of the early triage work and process documentation that could otherwise occupy significant team resources.

Placing the focus on policing, not paperwork

With employee and executive buy-in secured, West Midlands Police began expanding automation into processes associated with operational policing in 2019 to hand officers back more time in the day and increase capacity in struggling areas.

For example, without automation, to upload witness statements, officers would have had to return to base, taking up to an hour each way, to manually input the information into the correct system. Now, an officer simply has to complete a digital statement in an app whilst in the field and a robot will download the document locally, search in the system for the case, and attach the files as necessary. Since June 2020, 23,000 statements have been processed, saving 3,000 hours of officer processing time, not to mention the countless hours and fuel saved from negating the need to travel back to base.

What's more, the process is now also less vulnerable to human error. Rather than running the risk of accidentally attaching the wrong part of the document to the system, the robot follows the same strict steps each time, making sure only the correct information is shared with the Crown Prosecution Service.

With bots now working in both back-office shared service

functions and within operational policing, the balance between paperwork and policing is starting to shift.

Addressing human bias

Software robots working within recruitment related processes will also help to combat issues surrounding unconscious bias. Within vetting, for example, robots can be used to not only streamline the process but to also level the playing field, ensuring all candidates have the same experience.

"The vetting process can be vulnerable to a certain level of unconscious bias. Candidates with names from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds could find themselves being inadvertently exposed to repeated searches due to a number of spelling variations being entered into the system. This is a wrong we need to right," explains Gregory.

As a robot performs these initial vetting checks automatically, candidates aren't as vulnerable to inadvertent biases.

While we can talk of hours saved and total number of documents processed, it is often these non-transactional benefits that stand out to our team and most greatly impact our staff and stakeholders.

Scott Elliott • Senior RPA Developer, West Midlands Police

The importance of careful consideration

While every automation journey will demand its own approach, informed decision-making and a focused plan have led to West Midlands Police's success so far.

Careful consideration is key to choosing the right vendor. It isn't simply a question of price. Instead, look into the training offered, the market availability of skills, and its ability to work with your systems.

Make sure you engage with the vendor early on and ask for proof of concept to set you up in good stead.

Gregg Hudson • Mobility and Automation Manager, West Midlands Police

For Gregory, this due diligence should also be taken when positioning a center of excellence (CoE). "We made the very conscious and calculated decision to place our Centre for Applied Automation within IT and Digital. This allows us to avoid any conflict with IT, to stand up our infrastructure with ease, to own improvements and maintenance, and to explore the full range of options for a process rather than jumping straight to automation where it may not be the best fit," he explains.

Elliott adds: "We consider the design and architecture of every automation carefully. Ultimately, the design stage is just as important as the build stage. You must make sure you aren't chasing your tail with automation maintenance and improvements down the line, so we take the time to collect detailed stakeholder knowledge of the process and focus on designing automations that can withstand the test of time."

These considerations and assessments have allowed West Midlands Police to overcome resistance and begin revolutionizing operational efficiency, along with a whole host of secondary benefits. Looking ahead, the force will continue deploying bots into more departments, bringing more employees onto the journey, and experimenting with complementary technologies that they hope in the future will provide the bots with more autonomy.

With all current and future projects, the same goal remains— improve operations to better serve the community West Midlands Police has a duty to protect.

Want to hear more? Listen to West Midlands Police share their success story in <u>this fireside chat.</u> (https://start.uipath.com/west-midlands-police.html)

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