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All Tomorrow's Crimes: The Future of Policing Looks a Lot Like Good Branding

By Darwin Bond-Graham and Ali Winston
Wednesday, Oct 30 2013

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Shortly after forming PredPol, Friend left the Santa Cruz Police Department and successfully ran for county supervisor in Santa Cruz. Ryan Coonerty announced his intent to join Friend on the Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors in July of this year. Friend,

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With *Is the Is Are*, DIIV Frontman Zachary Cole Smith Finally Sees The Light at the End of the Tunnel

Coonerty, and Fowler have served as PredPol's main lobbyists, approaching dozens of cities in an unusual sales effort. The statisticians Brantingham and Mohler have been very active in the sales effort too, giving presentations across the U.S. and lending PredPol an air of scientific authority before police customers and the press.

And that's where PredPol has been most successful: in its marketing algorithms. The company did not respond to interview requests for this story, but hundreds of records from more than a dozen cities tell a story of a company aggressively trying to expand its business.

PredPol distributes news articles about predictive policing's supposed success in L.A. to dozens of other police departments, implying that the company's software has been purchased and deployed by the LAPD. PredPol gave the mayor and city council of Columbia, S.C. — Fowler's hometown — a "confidential" briefing packet assembled by PredPol's Brantingham. Inside were slides and graphs illustrating L.A.'s supposedly successful use of predictive policing to reduce crime. In one graph, Brantingham compared year-over-year crime rates for two six-month spans. His graph shows that in November 2011 with the "rollout" of PredPol in L.A., crime dropped significantly compared to the prior year. He concludes that "successful rollouts in Los Angeles and Santa Cruz, California have seen reductions in crime of 12 percent and 27 percent respectively." Columbia purchased PredPol's software earlier this year for \$37,000.

Swayed by the same claims, the city of Alhambra, just northeast of Los Angeles, purchased PredPol's software in 2012 for \$27,500. The contract between Alhambra and PredPol includes numerous obligations requiring Alhambra to carry out marketing and

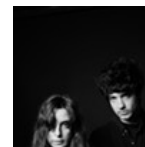


AP PHOTO/DAMIAN DOVARGANES

Jeff Brantingham demonstrating predictive policing at an LAPD command post in 2012.



Predpol



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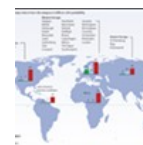
clipping at Brava Theater Sept. 11



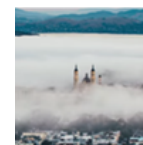
Tame Impala at The Greek Theatre, September 3

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THE SNITCH



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promotion on PredPol's behalf. Alhambra's police and public officials must "provide testimonials, as requested by PredPol," and "provide referrals and facilitate introductions to other agencies who can utilize the PredPol tool." And that's just for starters.

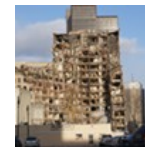
Under the terms of the contract, Alhambra must also "host visitors from other agencies regarding PredPol," and even "engage in joint/integrated marketing," which PredPol then spells out in a detailed list of obligations that includes joint press conferences, training materials, web marketing, trade shows, conferences, and speaking engagements.

PredPol has offered its software at a 50 percent discount to many cities in order to get them to agree to shill for the company. In Salinas, PredPol slashed its \$50,000 a year price tag in half on the condition that Salinas' police department "contribute to requested case studies, to be developed by PredPol, for use in its marketing."

The same sort of "case studies," developed by PredPol, led to an Aug. 15, 2011, *New York Times* article in which officers in Santa Cruz were depicted as having prevented auto burglaries thanks to the map's little red boxes. PredPol supposedly led the cops to a specific parking garage where they arrested two suspects. The *Times* quoted PredPol's executives and Santa Cruz cops, all of them praising the effectiveness of the software.

Since then, dozens of articles in national newspapers and magazines and local media have restated the same claims, often recycling quotes and statistics drawn directly from press releases written by PredPol for police departments. In Seattle, where PredPol signed a three-year contract, the company once again cut its list price, in this case by 36 percent, for a \$135,000 agreement that pressures city leaders to do marketing for the company.

But the Seattle Police Department's chief of information technology, Mark Knutson, appears to have recognized the impropriety of making these public relations agreements. He wrote to PredPol's Coonerty in November 2012, saying "I don't think we can make this sort of thing a contractual commitment." But while Knutson refused to sign an



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agreement obligating Seattle employees to promote PredPol, nothing precluded voluntarily participating in press events.

A flashy press conference featuring the mayor and chief of police was the result; local and national media covered the event and wrote favorable articles, including a feature on NPR's *All Things Considered*.

The thrust of all this media hype has been that PredPol's software works, and that it has demonstrably reduced crime in cities where it's used, and that cops have even apprehended burglars caught in the act thanks to PredPol's little red boxes.

But the case of Norcross, Ga., casts doubt on these claims. Norcross purchased PredPol's software last summer for \$28,500, agreeing to "participate in media outreach with PredPol, including issuance of a press release or holding of a press conference to announce the deployment of PredPol," and even requiring Norcross to "reference the PredPol brand name, wherever possible." On Aug. 23, PredPol issued a press release claiming that, thanks to its software, Norcross police "made multiple arrests on the first day of usage — including catching a burglar in the act."

PredPol's Brantingham called it a "big first day." Press reports multiplied, using quotes attributed to Norcross' police.

SF Weekly contacted Norcross requesting any sort of objective analysis of PredPol's performance. Norcross' Chief of Police Warren Summers responded that there have been no reviews or analyses of PredPol's software conducted, adding that "the Norcross Police Department has not utilized PredPol for a sufficient period of time to fully analyze its effectiveness."

In fact, every city that *SF Weekly* contacted seeking independent analyses or reviews of PredPol's software has told us that no such thing exists. In response to a public records request, Alhambra sent a "retrospective analysis" showing an increased accuracy in

predicting where crimes were more likely to happen using PredPol over another common method called hotspotting, or mapping reported crimes to identify locations where offenses have frequently occurred. The analysis concluded that "at the level of deployment in Alhambra, PredPol predicts 262 percent more crime correctly than hotspotting." This analysis, however, was carried out by PredPol.

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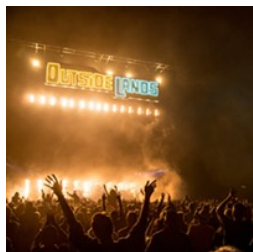
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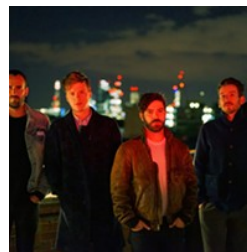
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Outside Lands 2016



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Taking a Much-
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