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Why data matters in policing

Former Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis talks analytics, predictive policing and cloud computing

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By PoliceOne BrandFocus Staff

Former Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis, a member of the Mark43 board of directors, has a keen appreciation for technology and its ability to enhance police work.

In this Q&A, Davis shares why data matters and how technology like Mark43's [Cobalt](#) software platform can be a force multiplier, helping cops connect the dots when it comes to predicting and fighting crime.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGE FACING MOST DEPARTMENTS TODAY?



Former Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis is now a law enforcement consultant and a member of the Mark43 board of directors. (Photo/Mark43)

It's important to be able to access the information that you have in your systems so that you can make better decisions on crime prevention strategies. Since the advent of programs like [CompStat](#), the ability to look at crime trends and to employ problem-solving techniques requires solid, valid data. In old-fashioned systems, sometimes you had a lot of information that was being stored that wasn't being accessed.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER CLOUD-BASED TECHNOLOGY?

The cloud issue is something that policing really needs to get a hold of. There are economies of scale when you use the cloud system that aren't available to on-premises servers, so for the first time, police are starting to do what corporations did years ago, which is moving information off-premises to systems that are less expensive.

HOW DO YOU SEE CLOUD TECHNOLOGY CHANGING POLICING IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

I think that you're finally going to get economies of scale, and you're going to get the utilization of Big Data to solve problems.

When we're looking at our data right now in Boston, we're looking at the information we have and maybe some contiguous communities, but to be able to look more broadly at crime trends in major cities, for instance – maybe cities that share the same type of criminal gangs that operate, cities that have similar demographics, cities that have similar economic issues – and to compare those crime incidents that occur across those venues, cloud computing makes that more possible.

I know that there's work being done at universities across the United States, including MIT, that I've done some work with here, to utilize Big Data to predict crime. Those are the kinds of things that cloud computing is going to allow us to do much more easily than having all these systems where you have to go in and mine the data and spend a lot of money in running special reports and things like that.

HOW DOES MARK43'S WORK SUPPORT THAT EFFORT?

It makes it very easy for the officers to input the information, and then it also makes it very easy for detectives and patrol officers to pull the information out. Old systems required a big expenditure when you wanted to change the way you did an inquiry on a particular crime, and to this day, there are software systems out there that charge thousands of dollars to add a new inquiry.

That's not the way Mark43 operates. The Mark43 platform has open search capabilities that are very flexible and allow a lot of customization, and they're just sort of built on a new concept of open computing as opposed to the kind of proprietary systems that came out 20 years ago.

In old systems, you looked up a report, and then you looked up a photograph, and then you looked up an evidence screen, and they didn't meld well together. Now it's all on one screen, and you can easily cross-reference files. It's just a much easier process to handle than other systems. It provides data to the officer on the street and allows that officer to become very helpful in problem-solving, which leads to reduction in crime.

WHAT DO YOU SAY TO COPS WHO ARE RELUCTANT TO ADOPT NEW TECHNOLOGY?

The only thing we can count on is change, but I think the great majority of people in policing and in other fields have recognized the value of change and embraced it.