

CASE STUDY

CDW HELPS DIGITAL FORENSICS EXPERTS GATHER EVIDENCE AND ENSURE JUSTICE IS SERVED

OVERVIEW

- Transforming Forensics and Forensic Capability Network wanted to deploy new technology and tools to enable police forces to improve how they collect digital forensics data related to rape and serious sexual offences
- The project depended on CDW purchasing 150 high-powered laptops, tablets and other devices configured with six separate "images" for forces across England and Wales
- The work had to be delivered within extremely tight time frames, drawing on CDW's internal teams with long-standing digital forensic expertise
- The project has delivered a range of advanced equipment that will better support the victims and witnesses of rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO)

ABOUT TRANSFORMING FORENSICS AND THE FORENSIC CAPABILITY NETWORK

- Transforming Forensics (TF) is a National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) programme funded by the Home Office (HO) to create advanced forensic capabilities that meet the changing needs of policing and the public.
- TF works with the Forensic Capability Network (FCN) and other law enforcement partners to deliver a range of activities, including the Rape Review Response project. FCN is the national network for forensic science in policing in England and Wales. Formed in April 2020, it supports 4,000 forensic practitioners as well as frontline investigators.
- At the heart of FCN is the desire for the forensic community to work together to deliver high quality, specialist forensic science capabilities, to share knowledge and improve resilience, efficiency, quality and effectiveness.

CHALLENGE

The Rape Review Response Project (RRRP) was a £5m initiative established in June 2021 at the request of the Home Office as part of the UK Government's drive to improve the response to rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO). It set out to provide new digital forensics tools to enable forces to take technology to victims, examine mobile and digital devices at crime scenes, and give investigators faster access to the right digital evidence. The ultimate aim was to deliver a faster, safer and more sensitive service for those affected by rape and other crimes, better evidence entering courts and increased confidence in the criminal justice system.

This requirement included the need to purchase, build and deliver 150 high-powered laptops and tablets, along with a range of accessories, to be used within digital forensic specialist vehicles. Each device needed to be installed with a package of bespoke Digital Forensic software programs, focused on the needs of each Police force.

"The challenge (for RRRP) was buying a complex range of hardware that required a build would need to be built of six separate configurations, each included niche software for very specialist digital forensics activity," says Paul Greaves, Senior Commercial Manager at FCN. "This requirement was compounded as the IT market suffered significant global supply chain issues resulting in extended lead times for many devices. Additionally we were fast approaching financial year end and all kit needed to be procured and delivered to Forces within a three month window."

FCN went to tender for £2.1 million, with CDW emerging as the chosen supplier. "It became clear that CDW was the only organisation that could manage our requirements," says Paul Greaves. "It has a dedicated Forensics Network Services Team providing many years of experience in digital forensics. The calibre of people in that CDW team gave us the confidence to move forward swiftly with the project."



SOLUTION

The immediate challenge was the availability of hardware that met the project's specifications. A worldwide shortage of computer chips meant that the lead time for the high-powered laptops and tablets, which had previously stood at three months, had been extended to six months. CDW needed to leverage its relationships with key vendors to source the devices within a couple of weeks.

"The market constraints had the potential to derail the project from the start," says Nigel Murphy, Business Development Director at CDW UK¹. "We had to work hard with our vendors, including splitting and staggering the order requirement, to ensure that the devices could be delivered on time. This was a critical activity – because we were up against some tight timeframes, and we needed to get hold of the hardware before the image building and software configuration could be progressed."

Once the equipment was delivered, CDW worked closely with FCN's commercial team to oversee licensing of specialist mobile data extraction software from vendors such as MSAB and Cellebrite. Intense efforts took place to ensure the

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highest levels of standardisation around configuration, with in-depth discussions on how the software was to be loaded onto the machines. What started as weekly project updates soon turned into daily stand-ups, where individual technical issues were debated and fixed. During this time, the CDW and FCN teams fostered a strong working relationship, which was essential in keeping the project on track.

"The configuration and image building process was highly complex because the six different images all involved many software programs from different vendors that weren't really designed to work together," says Nigel Murphy at CDW. "This is where our Forensics Network Services Team, which specialises in digital forensics in policing, came into its own. It had the knowledge and experience to carefully piece together the software packages

and load them so that they would work straight out of the box."

According to Paul Greaves at FCN, the insight provided by CDW was crucial to the delivery of the project. "The level of professionalism from the account management and technical team at CDW was exceptional, and all the technical issues and documentation required were fully satisfied. When the hardware was delivered, there was a lot of configuration, proof-of-concept and device test build that needed to be carried out. CDW performed these tasks most efficiently, and then went on to build, bundle and despatch the initial set of devices before the first deadline."

OUTCOME

The initial project to provide hardware and software bundles for 24 Police forces in England and Wales was delivered successfully and ahead of time. The further forces are set to be delivered to agreed timelines from 2022. Then, as part of an ongoing five-year programme, CDW will continue to provide support to ensure that the devices are kept updated and performing to exacting requirements.

According to Paul Greaves at FCN, the deployment of the equipment will have a significant impact on digital forensics investigations, enabling the provision of better support to the

victims and witnesses of RASSO. "We often talk about the 'golden hour principle' in criminal investigations – the period immediately following an offence where the maximum amount of material can be gathered. Through RRRP, forces will now be better equipped to make the most of that crucial time, supporting victims and witnesses and helping to ensure that justice is done."

Meanwhile, CDW will continue to support FCN by identifying additional IT projects that could further help improve its performance. Nigel Murphy at CDW says: "Most of the hardware

and software deployed in support of digital forensic activity is classed as laboratory equipment. It performs specific roles and must be conformity assessed by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS).

"CDW is leading the enablement of digital forensics and provides a unique and proactive service to organisations assessed by UKAS. We will continue working with FCN to deliver value and ensure that its equipment and standards are never compromised."

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To learn more about how CDW and our specialist Forensics Network Services team can help you, please contact your Account Manager or email customersuccess@uk.cdw.com



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