

Kent Police Create Video Links to Virtual Courts



Kent Police uses Cisco TelePresence to deliver faster justice, optimize resources, and reduce costs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Kent Police

Industry: Public Sector, Police

Location: Kent, England, United Kingdom

Number of Employees: 6000

Challenge

- Improve efficiency of criminal justice processes
- Better utilize police time and resources
- Reduce costs related to court appearances

Solution

- Secure, network-based, Cisco TelePresence

Results

- Support courts in making timely decisions and increase public safety
- Avoid unnecessary police travel and court attendance
- Reduce cost of overnight custody, transportation, and administration

Challenge

The criminal justice system in England and Wales is made up of several agencies (police, prosecution services, courts, probation, prisons, and youth justice services) that work together to bring offenders to justice, and to assist the victims of crime. The system has acquired layers of bureaucracy over time, and an extensive efficiency program is currently under way that focuses on three main areas:

- Use of video technology
- Digitalization of criminal justice case management process
- Efficiency improvements from streamlining processes.

Inspector Bob Platt is leading the drive at Kent Police to introduce video technology as a means of improving performance. "We're working towards the goal of 'same day justice' by turning cases around more quickly than before, which has the associated benefits of reducing costs and making better use of police officers' time," he says.

One area that is targeted for improvement is the process for conducting first hearings in magistrates' courts, which currently take place in one of two ways. In the first scenario, prisoners who have been charged, but not bailed, must remain in police custody overnight until the next available court sitting. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) estimates the cost of such overnight detentions at UK£540 (US\$890) per night, added to which are transport, security, and administrative overheads related to court appearances.

In the second scenario, prisoners are charged and bailed to appear in court at a later date, which is usually in two to eight weeks' time. During that period, the police are obliged to prepare case files that take into account both guilty and

not-guilty pleas. According to Inspector Platt, the ability to bring some prisoners into court more quickly could reduce this administrative burden by about 80 percent.

Alongside the desire to increase public confidence in the criminal justice system, a need also exists to make the system more flexible. Currently 70 percent of police officers who attend court to give evidence are not actually called to do so on the day, amounting to a significant waste of valuable police time. Kent Police wanted to take advantage of a change in the law in October 2010, which made it possible for the first time for police officers to give evidence by video link from a location outside the court building.



“We’ve built up our investment in Cisco technology over nine years, steadily increasing its capacity and functionality, and we’re confident that we’re getting an excellent return on our investment.”

Andy Barker
IT Director
Kent Police and Essex Police

Solution

In 2009, Kent Police was one of two forces to take part in an early pilot for “virtual courts.” The idea was to enable people charged with certain offences to make their first court appearances by video link, instead of in person. For the pilot, which was sponsored by the MoJ, Kent Police set up a video link between one magistrates’ court in Medway, and one police station in the North Kent area. Two rooms were available as virtual courts in the police station: one to provide the link between the defendant and the magistrates (or district judge), and the other to enable prisoners to remotely consult with solicitors, if necessary.

Kent Police already had an extensive Cisco® network, which it was using for data, wireless, and telephone communications. Like all infrastructures based on a Cisco architecture and solutions, the network was designed to support rich media, such as video, and it was already being used for videoconferencing. Instead of briefing all on-duty police officers in a central location at the start of each shift, Kent Police was using network-based video links to brief officers in their local police stations, thereby avoiding hundreds of miles of road travel, and saving hundreds of hours of police time every day.

“Because we had adopted the Cisco architectural approach and methodology, our network was ready to run video without any further investment,” says Andy Barker, IT director for Kent Police and Essex Police. “Setting up the virtual court pilot was not an issue, because we could use the existing infrastructure; from a technology perspective, we were just doing more of the same.”

Instead of leasing video equipment like other participants in the pilot, Kent Police decided to purchase two separate types of Cisco TelePresence® Systems: the C20 quick set model for the room systems and a mixture of EX60 and EX90 desktop models for the live link and booth solutions.

To make the virtual courts a reality, Kent Police needed to create a secure link between its own infrastructure and the Medway magistrates’ court on the Ministry of Justice’s network. Because connecting video capabilities on two different secure networks is complex, Cisco engineers worked with Kent Police to help overcome any compatibility issues. The reliability of the Cisco infrastructure contributed to the success of the virtual courts pilot, and remains essential to the 24-hour policing operation as a whole.

“We’ve built up our investment in Cisco technology over nine years, steadily increasing its capacity and functionality,” says Barker. “Videoconferencing is yet another extension of our resilient and versatile infrastructure, and we’re confident that we’re getting an excellent return on our investment.”

Results

After the initial pilot, Kent Police decided to retain the existing virtual court, and successfully applied for funding to extend the capability to other locations. By summer 2012, the force expects to have video-enabled custody suites in seven police stations connected to five magistrates’ courts throughout the Kent region.



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Bob Platt
Inspector
Kent Police

Kent Police is currently holding an average of 25 virtual court sessions each week, a figure that is expected to rise as the technology becomes more widely available. Efficiency has started to improve, with more examples of “same day justice” helping to safeguard victims of crime and eliminate delays in criminal justice processes.

“When we ran a Drink Driving campaign over Christmas, we used the virtual court to bring someone before the magistrates’ bench within 90 minutes of being charged,” says Platt. “That person lost their licence immediately, meaning they were no longer a danger to the public.”

Kent Police is also avoiding the cost of overnight custody for more prisoners, as well as the transportation and security costs associated with court appearances in person. The potential for efficiency gains is currently limited only by the fact that courts in England and Wales do not currently accept new cases after 3 pm, whereas the police typically start charging prisoners after this time. If court hours were extended, the benefits of a virtual capability would be even greater in terms of speedier justice, cost reductions, and better use of police resources.

Another advantage of virtual courts is that, unlike in a traditional court, police officers can see the progress and outcome of cases. As a result of this improved intelligence, they are better able to put appropriate measures in place, for example, to help ensure the safety of victims of domestic violence when an offender is bailed.

Because Kent Police has gained more flexibility in its operation, the force is now able to react more quickly to the changes in the day-to-day court environment. In addition, the network-based video capabilities mean that resources can be allocated and shared in a more efficient manner than before. If one magistrates’ court is particularly busy, for example, it is possible to use another one without having to move any prisoners; and if third parties such as translators are required, they can take part in a virtual court session at any location on the network.

Next Steps

Kent Police has identified another application for videoconferencing, using the same Cisco infrastructure and TelePresence systems. Known as Live Link, this enables police officers to give evidence in court by video link from their own police stations, instead of appearing in person. After a successful pilot, Kent Police started using Live Link in July 2011, using a similar set-up to the virtual court installation, but in a different room. In future, vulnerable witnesses will also be able to use this facility to give their evidence.

“Instead of waiting at court to give evidence, police officers now report to their police station and are allocated a task that best fits in with the court schedule,” says Inspector Platt. “This means that officers are productive while waiting to give evidence, and the Tasking Coordination Unit that oversees the daily running of a police division is able to use its resources more effectively. This is a very positive step that will lead to significant benefits in terms of productivity, cost reductions and, ultimately, a more efficient criminal justice system in Kent.”





For More Information

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For more information on Cisco TelePresence solutions, please visit:
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Product List

Video

- Cisco TelePresence System Quick Set C20
- Cisco TelePresence System EX60
- Cisco TelePresence System EX90
- Cisco TelePresence Codec C40



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