

Lincoln police employ smartphone technology to fight crime

Jonathan Ash

14 June 2011

P3i is a location-based service to aid the Lincoln Police Department. LINCOLN, NE (NET Radio) - Lincoln's new Public Safety Director Tom Casady said the city's police department is small for the city it serves. There are only 321 officers protecting a population of 225,000. That's 1.24 officers for every 1,000 citizens.

But when he was police chief, Casady said he did something to help his meager force - gave them a unique electronic tool.

It's called P3i, or Proactive Police Patrol Information. It's a location-based service utilizing the global positioning system capability of a mobile device married with numerous data bases.

For non-techies, it's smart-phone technology.

"In a mapping application, you've got location-based services, and they're really quite common," Casady said. "You'll have thousands of people looking today for Thai food, Wells Fargo ATMs and Starbucks in cities they're unfamiliar with."

Casady said he came up with the idea during a recent business trip to Los Angeles while using his new cell phone to search for a place to eat. Push pins began popping up, giving him numerous choices.

"As I was doing that, I was thinking to myself, 'I have all the parts and pieces of this exact functionality for things like crimes and registered sex offenders and parolees and gang members, people with arrest warrants,'" he said. "And I thought I could be delivering this information to police officers in the same way that the information about restaurants is being delivered to me."

Along with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Casady began working with Ian Cottingham, director of Computing Innovation Group at UNL. After being awarded a \$295,000 National Institute of Justice grant, they began developing the software to bring existing police data together.

"We built the software that runs on the mobile devices," Cottingham explained. "We built the software that displays the map and plots where people of interest are for the police and does all the geo-tracking. The software we built knows where you are, and as you drive around, it knows what's going on around you and is able to display that."

Say an officer has an iPad. He or she launches the P3i app and within seconds a Google-like map loads with multicolored push pins designating different data groups: gang members, sex

offender, parolees, current warrants.

Officer Nate Flood has nearly 20 years with Lincoln PD and was one of three officers to test-drive P3i during the app trial period in February and March.

"Before P3i we'd have warrant details where we'd research warrants, print out a list, you'd have to look to see when the warrant was issued, go pull their picture, pull their vehicle, do some research, maybe (go) where they work," Flood said. "It could easily take, to research 20 warrants, easily an hour and a half maybe to pull up all that information that P3i can pull up within just a matter of minutes, ready to go just at a fingertip touch."

But Flood said P3i is much more than a time-saver.

"That's what's great about the automatic vehicle locator," he said. "Say I didn't have time to get on the radio and all of a sudden I'm calling for help because (someone's) fighting with me. I never got my location out. (Dispatch) can see right where I'm at."

In the first month - May 4 through June 4 - P3i was gradually issued to a total of 60 officers who received the application following one of 17 training sessions. Casady said that in that time, police used the app to make 307 contacts or attempted contacts with people of interest whom they otherwise wouldn't have known about. Of those contacts, Casady says, 43 arrests for warrants were directly attributable to P3i.

Currently, Lincoln PD has 60 patrol units equipped with P3i on four different devices: iPad, iPhone, Motorola Android phones and Zoom tablets. It's the same P3i app which will soon be available to the public as a download. That version will grant access to only that information already available to the public.

Today, June 14th, Casady launched the police department's use of P3i at the [National Institute of Justice's](#) Crime Mapping Research Conference in Miami, Fla.

© Copyright 2011, [NET Radio](#)