Case Study

For South Dakota criminal investigators: Better efficiency, organization and accountability

Company: South Dakota Criminal Investigators primarily responsible for the investigation of major felony crimes.

Industry: Public Safety/Law Enforcement

Region: Americas

Company Size: Medium Enterprise

Type of Solution: Industry Specific Application

Challenge: Investigators needed a way to improve their efficiency as they captured web-based images and video as evidence. Multiple software applications and configurations complicated this ability. And prosecutors needed to be able to understand where the evidence was coming from, so that they could present their cases more effectively.

Solution: WebCase consolidated and streamlined investigative functions, helped prosecutors digest and understand evidence, and enabled the unit director to track who was using the investigative computer for what purposes.

Vere Software

Popularity among other investigators

The state blocks social network and other forms of Internet access for its employees. So while Google searches were OK, the investigators needed much more. "P2P requires investigators to find out IP addresses," the unit director explains, "and they often need to visit social networking sites to see suspects' and other subjects' profiles, along with what they are talking about online."

Investigators also needed access to "questionable" sites. "If physical videotapes are recovered during a search," says the director, "investigators need to be able to see—and record—the distribution site."

The unit had installed a single open-access computer so his investigators could do their work. Investigators from outside the unit had already been using it to build their cases, too, but once WebCase was installed, it really caught on. Narcotics and white-collar crime investigators especially use the software to capture online evidence from blogs and social networking sites.

In one drug case, police were able to gain access to an arrestee's favorite social networking sites. "They used WebCase to record a chat room conversation where he talked about what he had done," the director explains, "including crimes committed while he was on parole."

In another drug case, a suspect had posted bond following his arrest for possession with intent to distribute. Investigators had gained intelligence on his activities from the social networking sites where he was a member. Upon his release, they used their WebCase undercover identities to join the sites' chat rooms and record his conversations about the crimes he had committed—even in the previous few hours.

Finding Solutions

Investigators with one South Dakota high tech crime unit are well familiar with the need for properly documented, authenticated digital evidence. In addition to conducting online investigations, they perform forensic examinations on seized computers.

Until recently, however, obtaining this standard for their online investigations could be difficult. Investigators were using two well-known pieces of software to capture images and video. The software worked, but the unit director says it had its limitations. "In our work we need to play back videos as well as download them. The video capture tool could do that, but it was hard to transfer the evidence to disk," he explains.

And these were not the only tools investigators used. There were multiple software applications, all in different configurations, which complicated investigators' tasks and added time to their workloads.

The director had the opportunity to view a WebCase demonstration at a conference in 2008. Seeing that WebCase had the potential to solve these problems and more, he obtained a copy.

Since then, the unit's work has grown more efficient and better organized, enabling investigators to make several arrests on both state and federal charges. WebCase has even attracted investigators from other units, and helped prosecutors with their own workflow.

Case Study: **For South Dakota criminal investigators: Better efficiency, organization and accountability**

Easy auditing for accountability

A single Internet-enabled computer in an otherwise blocked building might be tempting for lunch-hour Web surfers, but the unit director had always tracked its usage. "We used to have a clipboard with a sign-in sheet," he says, "where users wrote their names and time in/time out, along with all the sites they visited." This was time-consuming and not totally reliable.

Because each investigator has their own WebCase login, however, it is easier for the director to see their individual activities. "WebCase keeps a log so that I can see everything they've done without having to go back in the browser history," he says. This is so easy, in fact, that he performs an audit once every two weeks. "The amount of traffic we got because of that computer used to be cumbersome," he notes, "but WebCase makes it easy to manage."

Enhancing investigations and prosecutions

Within the unit, different investigators use WebCase for different functions. One uses it to keep his online chat sessions separate from the rest of his casework. Another uses it to help track peer-to-peer (P2P) filesharing activity. "He records downloads, and organizes the IP addresses where the downloads are coming from," says the unit director.

The undercover investigators have found particular benefit. "WebCase keeps them much better organized than the way we were doing it before," the director says. "If a subject mentions information that's in the undercover persona profile, it's there on the screen for us to refer to, along with the subject's own profile."

WebCase's reporting functionality is prosecutors' favorite feature, says the director, because the reports' format is easier for them to digest and understand in aggregate. "Before, separate evidence would be unorganized on a disk," he says. "WebCase collects and records everything we do, from image capture to video download and playback."

Prosecutors especially appreciate being able to see the process of downloading and playing a video, because WebCase is able to capture all the information about the download site in addition to the video content itself. "This helps both prosecutors and defense understand the evidence better," says the director. "The defense sees exactly what the cops saw. The pleas come much more quickly now."

Prosecutors also use WebCase to vet people they plan to call to the stand, whether suspect, victim, or witness. "They look up people on both sides," says the unit director. "They check the credibility of everyone intended to go on the stand."

Case Study: For South Dakota criminal investigators: Better efficiency, organization and accountability

Results:

- Investigators and prosecutors got the access to the Internet they needed, without compromising IT security policy.

- Investigators across disciplines used WebCase to collect and preserve online evidence related to child exploitation, narcotics and white collar crimes.

- Investigators' efficiency improved as WebCase became their one-stop solution for video, image and chat capture, along with evidence presentation.

- The unit director was able to keep a detailed, accurate, but fuss-free audit trail of everyone who used WebCase and for what cases they used it.

- Both prosecuting and defense attorneys clearly understand the evidence and where it comes from, enabling them to reach plea agreements more quickly -- and enhancing due process for the accused.

VERE SOFTWARE
INVESTIGATIVE TOOLS

Case Study: For South Dakota criminal investigators: Better efficiency, organization and accountability