CODY and Lehigh County, Pa. Create Multi-Agency Information Sharing Network

Delivering integrated justice

> By Myles Tillotson

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A deadly shooting outside a Bethlehem, Pa. nightclub in January left the police department and the Lehigh County District Attorney's Homicide Task Force with leads but no suspect. However, investigators quickly uncovered information stored in a neighboring community's police records management system (RMS) through a search of the County's COBRA.net data sharing system, which ultimately helped identify the suspect.

COBRA.net is the nexus of a groundbreaking countywide integrated-justice information network in Lehigh County, Pa. that provides real-time access to cross-jurisdictional RMS and booking information. From officers on the street running a name/vehicle check to investigators searching countywide to find that piece of evidence that could help close a case (like the Bethlehem shooting), the network helps law enforcement across the county fight crime every day. And through paperless incident report exchange with the Lehigh County District Attorney's Office and centralized e-booking at the county jail, the solution fosters true collaboration across the criminal justice community.

This information sharing network is powered by a set of integrated solutions provided by Pennsylvania-based CODY Systems, built on their standards-based COBRA.net data integration foundation. The integrated solution includes modules for countywide RMS, as well data exchange with all PDs, the County Jail, DA's Office and regional real-time crime center. Lehigh County District Attorney Jim Martin, who helped guide the vision of the network, says, "CODY has played a pivotal role in our success. And it's more than just their software. They've provided the expertise, the experience and the commitment to ensure that the solution that powers our integrated justice network serves all law enforcement personnel across Lehigh County."

The Goal: Countywide Records Management and Sharing

The process of building the Lehigh County integrated RMS and justice network began over five years ago when police chiefs across the county joined together to solve a common problem. Located within 100 miles of New York City, Lehigh County is at the core of one of the nation's fastest-growing metropolitan areas. Criminals—and their behavior—can move easily across its mix of closely linked urban, suburban and rural communities. Chief Douglas Kish of the Catasauqua Police Department, who was President of the county Police Chiefs

Association at the time, recalls the 2008 decision: "We knew how important access to real-time, countywide information was to our officers in the field, as well as our DA, so this was our primary goal."

To reach this goal, the chiefs began the search for a proven RMS that they could implement, maintain, and use separately but that would be part of a larger, real-time network, allowing them to easily share information among themselves and with the DA's Office. An RMS can improve productivity and efficiency by reducing reporting time and duplicate data entry, but it's the use of that information—by other officers and law enforcement agencies—that can really make a difference. "There were five or six RMS systems in use in the county that couldn't exchange information with one another," the chief said. "That needed to change."

After a thorough evaluation, the county decided to partner with CODY Systems to provide the end-to-end integrated justice solution the chiefs envisioned. "We were honored to be selected by Lehigh County to partner with them on this solution," commented Frances Heffner, President of CODY Systems. "Lehigh County is now one of seven COBRA.net-powered initiatives in Pennsylvania, which are part of our growing nationwide list, including state-wide exchange networks like the Missouri Data Exchange (MoDEx)".

Lehigh County Executive, Tom Muller, was also heavily involved in the county's decision to partner with CODY. "It has exceeded even my hopes," Exec. Muller said. "To see how this system has come together and grown over the years is a testament to the leadership and commitment this important project has had from the beginning from both the county and CODY."

The Integrated Justice Solution: Step 1 – Countywide RMS

The first step in the process was providing CODY Records Anywhere to the participating agencies through funding provided by the county and technical assistance from the DA's Office. With focus and collaboration, this was completed in under 10 months. "CODY came out (to each agency) and did a site assessment and told us what infrastructure we needed," Chief Kish said. "When it came time, we

▲ Chief Douglas Kish of the Catasauqua PD.

▲ Det. Darren Simmers of the Upper Macungie PD.

were ready to go and implementation was immediate." Plus, he added, "CODY is easy for officers to learn, which made training fast."

The RMS provides each department with two access points that share the same, unified back-end. CODY Express is a full Web-deployed RMS application and field reporting tool designed and configured for efficient, bandwidth-lean use on laptops in the field or anywhere it is needed. CODY Desktop provides the same functionality along with additional data analysis, reporting and administrative features for use at the station. With CODY Desktop, users can create reports from virtually any combination of the department's RMS data through the Report Explorer tool. "As an administrator, my favorite feature is the information I can generate and the reports I can create to instantly monitor what's actually happening in the borough," Chief Kish stated.

Step 2 - Cross-Agency Data Exchange through COBRA.net – "Facebook for Law Enforcement"

Concurrent with the RMS implementation for all agencies, the county deployed its new COBRA.net data core and exchange engine, with each agency being linked in as they went live on CODY RMS. The COBRA.net Core forms the foundation for all of the county's data integration and exchange projects, both present and future. While allowing each agency to maintain its RMS data and access privileges, COBRA.net brings all of this information together and creates a network that allows authorized users from all agencies to search for information from all other participating agencies—at the station or in the field. When a user at one agency saves information on a person, incident, vehicle, etc., including digital photos, in their RMS, it's available through COBRA.net within seconds. As Detective Darren Simmers of Upper Macungie Police Department noted: "CODY RMS keeps all the shared information from our department in one place. It is NEVER mixed up with RMS data from the other agencies. Yet, with COBRA.net, we still have access to everybody else's shared information. It's all right there—in real time."

Like their counterparts across the country, the county's investigators and officers in the field have access to multiple federal and state criminal databases, but COBRA.net helps officers fill in the blanks. "Most of those databases only have information if the person was arrested," Detective Simmers said, "and even then, the data in those external sources can be old, or the incident report and

contact information, like phone numbers and past addresses, may not be there. They are in COBRA.net, though. Best of all, COBRA.net lets us search all connected data sources with ONE SEARCH. We don't have to search each system… COBRA.net puts it in one place. It's like Facebook for the law enforcement community!"

What makes COBRA.net so valuable, Simmers maintained, is the variety of information available and the different ways it can be searched. "Not everyone has a driver's license," he explained. "Before COBRA.net, if all you had was a driver's license, you were done. Now, if I have a suspect's nickname and age, for example, I can use C.tac 5, CODY's Web-based search app, to run a county-wide search on that name and then an age query on just the name matches. That gives me something to work with." COBRA.net can also run searches on a partial license plate number or other incomplete information, which can help narrow down the scope of an investigation.

When asked about the primary benefit of this information, Chief Kish quickly responded: "Officer safety is the key and COBRA.net with C.tac 5 provides that extra measure of safety for officers in the field." An address search that shows anyone associated with that address and their history of violent behavior, for example, can help prepare an officer before entering a residence on even a routine matter. "A lot of bad people just haven't been caught yet," Simmers noted. "A long list of hits in COBRA.net is a red flag that I need to deal with that person differently."

At present, all Lehigh County police departments and several county task forces, as well as three departments in adjacent Northampton County participate in the network. In addition, information on individuals arrested in the county by state police troopers and processed at the county's central booking facility flows through COBRA.net and is available for searching by appropriate personnel.

Secure Data Exchange with Disparate Systems: No Agency Gets Left Behind

When the Chiefs Association chose CODY RMS, Allentown Police Department, the county's largest city, had just committed to a different provider's RMS software. Fortunately, COBRA.net is specifically designed to work with other data sources beyond CODY RMS; in fact, most COBRA.net initiatives are linking multiple, disparate RMS databases from other providers. CODY's Data Services Team worked closely with Allentown and Lehigh County to rapidly ensure a full understanding of the agency's data sharing
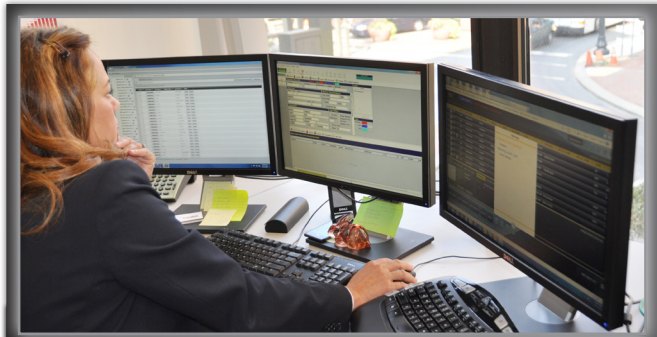
▲ Julia Kocis - RIIC Program Manager using CODY Express and searching COBRA.net

requirements and data security protocols.

Today, Allentown is sharing its RMS data in real time through COBRA.net just like every other department in the county without additional data management overhead or new procedures to control what data is shared. "The agency simply continues with their RMS business as usual; COBRA.net does the rest," said Matt Fowler, CODY's Director of Data Services.

Step 3 – Centralized eBooking and Data Exchange with the DA's Office

Once COBRA.net and CODY RMS were in place, next up was deploying the additional integrated justice aspects of the solution. First off, in support of the county's recent move to centralized booking of arrestees, the solution provided a new paperless and integrated Centralized Booking module that eliminates data entry and saves time. Previously, an officer would have to return to his/her station with the arrestee in custody, complete the arrest report, and then transport the arrestee to court or the county jail and wait for staff to review the report. That could take hours. Now the officer can complete the arrest report on scene rather than at the station, immediately drop the arrestee off at the centralized booking facility, and return to duty. According to Julia Kocis, the DA's Office Technical Assistance Liaison throughout the entire project, "The whole idea is to get the officer back on the street sooner."

Using the solution, central booking facility staff have direct access to the arrest report for review. Relevant data from the arrest report is automatically uploaded to the state's arrest photo capture system, eliminating data entry and possible keying errors. The digital photo is then automatically appended to the record in the arresting department's CODY RMS where it's available to officers across the county, with the proper security access.

Secondly, the County DA's office now also has direct protected access to information and documentation from all participating CODY RMS departments. The interface has aided prosecution, saved time, and reduced paperwork. All incident reports are completed in CODY and all related documents are scanned or uploaded and attached electronically to the report in the system. When an incident report is marked "ready for DA," the report and all linked attachments are accessible electronically by the assigned assistant DA. Nothing is misplaced or unsent and all reports and documentation are current. "It's been a real time saver for everyone," according to Julia Kocis. And, because it's entirely paperless, "we're not killing trees," Chief Kish added.

Solution in Action: Countywide Data Gives Investigators the Edge and Brings Bad Guys to Justice

Investigators at the county's Regional Intelligence and Investigation Center (RIIC) have also benefitted from the COBRA.net data core. RIIC investigators conduct specialized searches for information for identifying criminal behavior patterns, associations and solving crimes and offer this assistance to the region's smaller departments who lack internal resources to conduct in-depth investigations. According to Julia Kocis, now the RIIC Program Manager, "COBRA.net is the underlying data aggregator for RIIC. We knew that building COBRA.net first would make the RIIC easier." Rather than having to purchase a closed data-sharing package with proprietary analysis tools, the county was able to get their independent data-sharing foundation in place first so it could concentrate on finding the right analytical tools to mine the information sources.

It was through RIIC that investigators accessed COBRA.net information to help identify the suspect in the Bethlehem homicide. Witnesses described the vehicle the suspect fled in, and police were able to narrow down the model to two possibilities. A separate lead produced a pre-paid cell number used by a possible suspect, and a court order gave them a list of numbers called from that phone. Searching on those phone numbers found through COBRA.net, investigators identified an individual living in another Lehigh County jurisdiction whose vehicle was one of the likely models. The vehicle information was originally included in a crash report entered into that jurisdiction's CODY RMS at the accident scene by the responding officer several months before, and automatically available in COBRA.net. A subsequent interview of the vehicle owner ultimately led to the identification of the suspect.

"I have lived in the Lehigh valley for over 23 years and am committed to keeping our neighborhoods safe by supporting law enforcement with the solutions they need to help take criminals off the streets," Exec. Muller said. "The solution developed through the careful collaboration between CODY and the county is proving to be an essential part in this endeavor. I have found the folks at CODY to be honest, dependable and hard-working."

Key Factors for Success: Buy-in, Support and Commitment

Julia Kocis cited several factors in the solution's successful rollout, including the unified support of the chiefs as well as the executive-level commitment from the DA and county. "The buy-in from our organization was critical. The county could have provided the funding and stepped back, but that's an expensive gamble."

Finally, she stressed the role of CODY: "They've been part of this from the beginning and they've been tremendous. Their commitment to client service continues to this day. From the help desk up to Fran Heffner, they always personally answer our call."

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County RMS, Law Enforcement Data Exchange & Real-time Crime Center

Lehigh County, PA partnered with CODY Systems to deploy a **"paperless"** data exchange network among its law enforcement agencies: police departments, the District Attorney's Office and the County Jail. Powered by CODY's **COBRA.net and Records Anywhere** platform, the network includes RMS for all agencies, 'hand-ups' to the DA, central booking, and one-stop search of all law enforcement data sources. The solution also powers the **DA's Regional Intelligence and Investigations Center (RIIC)**, providing instant access to the county's disparate data sources.

CODY's relationship with Lehigh County is one example of how our flexible, highly scalable solutions can be tailored to meet the demands of agencies of all sizes, types, and missions. More importantly, it shows how our team implements a system... in true partnership with our clients.

For more details visit us on the web at *www.codysystems.com*.

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