

CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

How a Major Police Department in the U.S. Used Magnet ATLAS to Improve Case Management Efficiency

Case Assignment and Tracking Ensures Requests are Handled in a Timely and Effective Manner

THE ISSUES

- Consistently increasing data volumes and investigation requests from across 22 divisions.
- Duplication of requests and effort using an old email and fax-based system.
- Efficiently tracking and logging incoming requests and case progress.
- Lack of communication on relevant investigative findings to investigators and other stakeholders.

MAGNET FORENSICS TOOLS

- Streamlining the request process through web-based submission forms.
- Allowing stakeholders to track progress without examiners having to create reports.
- Enabling easy two-way communication between requesting detectives and forensic examiners.
- Integrating case activity with the COMPSTAT performance management system.

Investigation Type:
Case Management

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BACKGROUND

Managing incoming requests for digital forensic services can be challenging for any law enforcement agency. A case's priority can shift from day to day depending on what other cases are in the queue. The number of devices—and the amount of data—that need to be processed for each case grows every day. Examiners' schedules can change depending on court testimony, vacation, and sick time.

The members of the Cyber Crimes Section of one of the three largest Police Departments in the United States know this firsthand. Detective LT is one of nearly 20 investigators on the team, which also counts about half a dozen forensic examiners.

Those examiners field forensic requests from Detective LT, his colleagues, and more than 100 other users from at least 22 other divisions, specialized investigative units, and even some outside agencies. The requests can be from higher profile cases like robbery or homicide—which Detective LT says comprise the most requests—along with burglary, identity theft, crimes against children, and sexual assault.

To manage these requests, the unit used a piecemeal solution of email and fax submissions—an antiquated system that involved the Police Department's Cyber Crimes Section (CCS) emailing a form, which detectives then had to print and fill out in pen before faxing it back.

This stopgap method had its limitations. With no way to track who received the form or what kind of progress forensic examiners were making, detectives sometimes initiated the same request more than once, only to learn that the lab had inadvertently opened more than one investigation for the same request.

In addition, some requests didn't make it to their intended destination. "We had a lot of issues with duplicate requests between my department and the scientific investigation division," Detective LT explains. That division, which handles physical forensic evidence, also processes electronic evidence—specifically, phones—and as a result, collaborates closely with the CCS.

The Police Department recognized the clear need to update its system to log forensic requests—"a responsive online system that could handle large amounts of data with a secure backup," says Detective LT—and to allow detectives to track progress and communicate easily with forensic examiners.

The CCS team also needed to satisfy command staff requirements for a solution that could provide statistics for COMPSTAT, the performance management system that powers the Police Department's predictive policing model.

- On a strategic level, the ability to track not just the number of forensic requests that come to the lab, but also how much data and what types of devices the lab processes, is essential for determining future personnel and equipment requirements.
- On a tactical level, forensic evidence may have intelligence value that can be used to identify crime trends and patterns.



A SMOOTH, INTEGRATED IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCE

After a thorough review, Detective LT and his team chose ATLAS over three rival case management solutions because of its relative simplicity and ease of use, as well as the fact that the company's founders came from extensive law enforcement backgrounds. Competing solutions, says Detective LT, were too bloated to affect the kind of efficiency the team desperately needed.

"We thought we could implement ATLAS right away based on the demo," says Detective LT, a conviction that only grew after comparing ATLAS with the rival solutions. The customer web portal was easy enough for the average patrol officer to be able to create an account and to submit requests, which was a key requirement.

It also helped that ATLAS provided more value than the competition, by offering the right functionality at a better price-point. "[Other solutions] had a lot of extra features, but we didn't need them," Detective LT explains

A MORE EFFICIENT WORKFLOW

After using ATLAS for about a year, Detective LT says it's "working out great for us" as an online request and case management system. One of the key benefits from ATLAS is the ability to work on multiple examinations and manage caseloads and resources more efficiently. This is particularly important when multiple requests come in at one time.

ATLAS logs all requests, and immediately assigns a reference number. Behind the scenes, the CCS can manage cases and assign them to examiners. Users can rely on its built-in messaging system, along with email alerts from ATLAS to administrators notifying them of new cases and expiring software licenses, and to examiners about cases administrators have assigned to them.

Being able to point to empirical data that can show how the software implementation can help the rest of the Police Department was critical to "selling" ATLAS to command staff. As the CCS looks to expand ATLAS' deployment, this data could be critical to continued and future successes. "Our forensic resources are so scattered throughout the county, we need a central feeding point to screen examinations," Detective LT explains.

Another strong benefit of ATLAS for the team was the ability to add a stats package for the Police Department's COMPSTAT requirements—a capability that Detective LT says he didn't see in any other solution. Previously, Detective LT says administrators had to compile a spreadsheet manually. Commanders want to know how many homicides, crimes against children, property crimes, and other cases the CCS assists with per month.

ATLAS not only filters these categories and allows the export of a CSV; it also enables Detective LT to show both submitted and closed cases, two contextual key performance indicators, as well as the amount of data processed. This is another critical piece of data: already this year, the number of cases has surpassed 2016's total, and the number of terabytes processed continues to rise, too.



And like many other agencies with budget constraints, software competes for resources. ATLAS tracks software, including license expiration dates, and Detective LT says this can help alert the users in his unit when they need to put the budgeting and purchasing process—which hasn't changed—in motion.

Detective LT and his colleagues need to be able to communicate their needs to command staff clearly and succinctly. The usefulness of both Magnet Forensics tools—IEF and now ATLAS—helps them to make their case. With ATLAS now a part of Magnet Forensics' product family, Detective LT expects that its benefits will only continue to multiply and improve his unit's capacity to serve the rest of the department.

SEE MAGNET ATLAS IN ACTION FOR YOURSELF

If you'd like to learn more about Magnet ATLAS and how it can help you bring together digital evidence management, chain of custody, financials and budget management, asset management, resource management, and more, visit www.magnetforensics.com/magnet-atlas.

You can learn more by [requesting an in-depth personal demo](#) from an ATLAS expert.

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For more information call us at 1-844-638-7884
or email sales@magnetforensics.com