

CASE STUDY - GREATER MANCHESTER POLICE

MAGNET AUTOMATE

How a metro UK police force actions digital evidence in half the time, saving investigators 9.5 hours on each case and boosting wellness.



With Magnet AUTOMATE, processing is done... Instead of spending three days watching progress bars, I have all that waiting for me when I come in Monday morning.”

— Lucy Carey-Shields, Digital Forensics Investigator, GMP

The Challenge

Traditional methods ‘can’t keep up’

Day after day, more than 70 digital forensics examiners and investigators with Greater Manchester Police (GMP) strive to keep pace with the metro area.

Serving close to 2.7 million citizens, investigators carry a heavy workload, piling up “never-ending tasks that become more complex as we go,” notes Lucy Carey-Shields, a Digital Forensics Investigator with GMP since 2019.

With the average Briton using 10 connected devices, almost all criminal investigations now involve a digital element. Carey-Shields and other investigators handle multiple exhibits for every case, often including several 128GB phones with hundreds of apps each.

Still, even with mounds of evidence, investigators feel a duty to the one – too often, the victim of child sexual exploitation (CSE) or the fatality of a homicide.

“It can be quite disheartening for staff when they see there’s a lot of cases in the backlog,” says Chris Whiteley, Digital Forensic Quality and Development Coordinator for GMP, with 18 years in the field. “We feel a personal responsibility to get through the work.”



GREATER MANCHESTER
POLICE

Third largest police force in England and Wales

Employs 7,000 officers, 3,500 police staff

Covers close to 500 square miles

CHALLENGES

- Year over year increase in cases, complexity
- Evidence backlog delays
- High volume exposure to traumatizing material

SOLUTIONS

- 24/7 processing of digital evidence
- Streamlined workflows across lab toolkit
- Deep integration with Magnet AXIOM

RESULTS

- 55% acceleration in digital evidence processing times
- 9.5 hours saved per case on average during a pilot
- Faster outcomes for agencies, victims
- Improved wellness for investigators and examiners



Coupling this sense of duty with the gut-wrenching nature of many serious crimes can affect investigator health as well.

“It can be overwhelming – not only the volume of data, but the complexity and harrowing nature of some of these crimes,” Carey-Shields explains. “We have to be careful on what we take home day to day. Some material can be quite traumatic and hard to deal with.”

To serve its professionals and community, GMP needed to mitigate exposure to disturbing material while accelerating digital evidence processing to CSE and other serious crimes. “The amount of cases we have are growing year by year,” Carey-Shields explains. “Working the old way, we can’t keep up.”

24/7 digital evidence processing

9.5 hours saved per case on average

55% faster investigation turnaround

How Magnet AUTOMATE Helps

Automation is a ‘game-changer’

By easing the burden through automated mobile and computer workflows, Magnet AUTOMATE encourages wellness for investigators and enables them to hand off digital evidence to officers and prosecutors faster and easier.

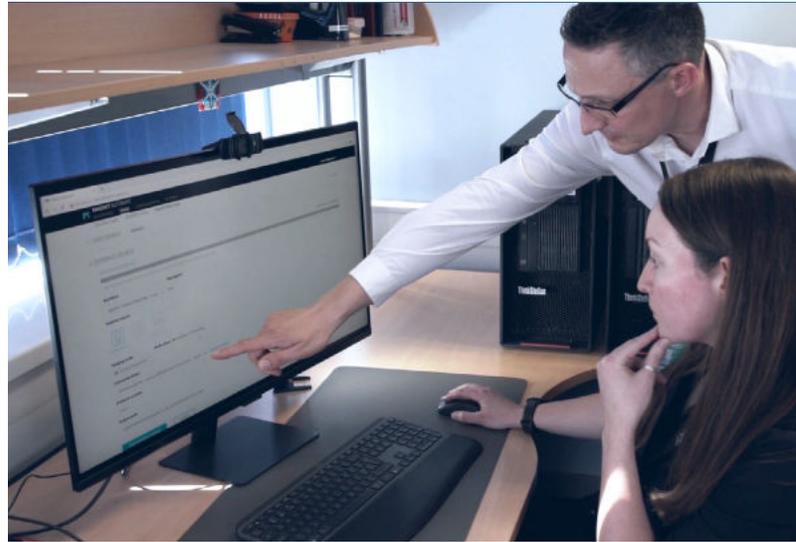
In fact, GMP saved on average 9.5 hours per case, accelerating turnaround for digital forensics investigations by 55%, according to a year-long pilot conducted by the police force in conjunction with the Forensic Capability Network.

“We jumped to be part of the pilot for AUTOMATE,” Whiteley recalls. Following years of using Magnet AXIOM for centralized analysis, his team took quickly to expanding the ecosystem.



“AXIOM is a tool we already know and use daily,” he says. “Being able to incorporate that into AUTOMATE makes everything seamless and it gives us the ability to start working on investigations a lot quicker.”

GMP uses AXIOM and products from other providers to investigate evidence from mobile, computer, cloud, and other sources. AUTOMATE then integrates with all of these tools to drive digital investigation nonstop, relieving overworked personnel.



“I used to spend half of my time processing that data and waiting for things to finish before I could move to the next task,” Carey-Shields notes.

“With AUTOMATE, processing is done for video, images, and other exhibits. Instead of spending three days watching progress bars, I have all that waiting for me when I come in Monday morning.”

By processing digital evidence 24/7 and saving on average more than nine hours on every case, AUTOMATE serves as the equivalent of 10 full-time investigators who also happen to be available to work every night and weekend.

However, automated efficiency does not replace GMP’s human experts, it supercharges them.

“The output from AUTOMATE is a package ready to go. There’s no downtime waiting for processes to complete,” Carey-Shields says.

“For CSE cases, I have a preliminary report, I know categorization, and whether safeguarding needs to be done urgently. For me, that is just marvelous.”

Whiteley also noted AUTOMATE reduces exposure to traumatic material. “Using AUTOMATE, the team won’t have to look at

indecent images all the time,” he noted. “Instead, keyword searching and hashing identifies lots of images prior to the investigators picking up the jobs and doing the grading.”

Carey-Shields also shares enthusiasm for other AUTOMATE features used by GMP.

“The magic of Watch Folders never ceases to blow my mind,” she relates, referring to the AUTOMATE feature that simplifies intake of mobile device images from any acquisition tool. “That was a game-changer for me.”

‘Faster outcomes have a massive impact for victims’

Overall, the most important result is in how Carey-Shields and dozens of other investigators can now shift energy to other critical efforts.

“AUTOMATE takes repetitive processing away and allows me to focus on other tasks,” she says.

“My primary focus can be on victim ID, safeguarding, talking to police officers, and disseminating intelligence to different agencies whilst AUTOMATE is working in the background on what I need it to do.”

By automating its workflows, GMP harnesses the full power of its lab systems and hardware day and night. The metro police force also empowers its time-strapped investigators, front-line personnel, and other staff in their mission for a safer Greater Manchester.

“With AUTOMATE, I’m more confident in my process and results,” Carey-Shields says. “I can get reports out and outcomes quicker. That has a major impact on police officers who are doing a challenging job.”

Though, she is quick to add: “Ultimately, those faster outcomes have a massive impact for victims.”

For Carey-Shields, AUTOMATE helps her care for the one, and through that, for everyone.



When I have a finished case and I’ve given evidence in court, I’ve made a difference not only in one victim’s world, but in the wider community,”

“It’s one of the reasons I do this job, it’s why I go home each day feeling some satisfaction.”

In all, Carey-Shields leaves her office knowing two things for sure: That the work she’s doing enables justice for the victimized. And, with AUTOMATE on watch, that this work will continue even as she sleeps.

'A new way of working'

Given results to date, GMP plans to roll out AUTOMATE fully, and include additional workflows to hasten outcomes in fraud cases and other crimes.

"We tended not to interact with our financial investigation unit," Carey-Shields relates. "Now, we can open things up, streamline processes, and tailor digital forensics for them."

Introducing other case types or artifacts doesn't faze Carey-Shields. She and Whiteley both credit a strong partnership with Magnet Forensics for GMP's early success with digital transformation.

"We're a risk-averse unit and AUTOMATE is a new way of working with processing being done for you," Carey-Shields says. She noted Magnet Forensics is quick to action support requests and implement ideas from GMP experts.



"Using AUTOMATE, we're more confident in the results, knowing all is validated."

Beyond backlogs, Carey-Shields and other investigators say automation allows them to focus on more complex issues.

"Overall, we can put added policies and procedures in place for the ever-changing aspects of forensics."



Chris Whiteley

Digital Forensic Quality and Development Coordinator, GMP



Lucy Carey-Shields

Digital Forensics Investigator, GMP

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