

GMP steps up digital investigations

Greater Manchester Police has accelerated its digital investigations into child sexual exploitation using automatic processing software.

On average, the force completed digital investigations 9.5 hours faster during a year-long pilot of the software from Magnet Forensics, accelerating turnaround for digital forensics investigations by 55 per cent.

It now plans to embed the Magnet Automate solution in all its digital investigations.

Dave Smith, head of digital forensics at Greater Manchester Police, said it has seen “an incredible increase in the volume of digital evidence, year-over-year, for the better part of a decade”.

He added: “In the next year, Greater Manchester Police is going to build on our early success and roll out Magnet Automate as an essential function to all our digital investigations.

“It will fundamentally improve how we address critical digital evidence and allow us to complete our digital investigations faster than we ever could by using what was once hours of downtime in evenings and weekends to continue to advance our work.”

Magnet Forensics says the software uses “automation and orchestration” to keep police investigations running 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year without human intervention.

The pilot was run in conjunction with the UK’s Forensic Capability Network. In addition to quicker completion of digital investigations into child sexual exploitation, Greater Manchester Police processed digital evidence 55 per cent faster and improved officer wellbeing by reducing exposure to sensitive content, such as child sexual abuse material.

“It can be overwhelming – not only the volume of data, but the complexity and harrowing nature of some of these crimes,” explained Lucy Carey-Shields,

a digital forensics investigator at Greater Manchester Police. “We have to be careful on what we take home day-to-day. Some material can be quite traumatic and hard to deal with.”

She added: “The amount of cases we have are growing year by year. Working the old way, we can’t keep up.”

The influx of digital evidence being handled by Greater Manchester Police is directly linked to the public becoming more connected.

As of 2020, the average UK household contained more than ten internet-enabled devices, up 26 per cent from 2017, says Magnet Forensics.

It added: “Each one of those devices contains droves of data that have proven essential to helping police fight

victims and suspects and the time that the digital evidence found on them is processed.

“Greater Manchester Police’s success demonstrates the transformational impact that Magnet Automate is having on digital investigations. It relieves evidence bottlenecks to ensure that digital evidence is an asset that helps investigators get to the truth and does not instead become a liability that threatens to delay the pursuit of justice.”

Magnet Forensics says its software is helping agencies such as Greater Manchester Police run more efficient digital investigations.

It keeps investigations running and ensures they no longer grind to a halt by

automating routine and repetitive tasks.

It also enables forces to maximise their existing hardware and software investments by simultaneously processing evidence for multiple cases.

When a task is complete, it will automatically move on to the next one and synchronise other interoperable digital investigation solutions. When a case is completed, the

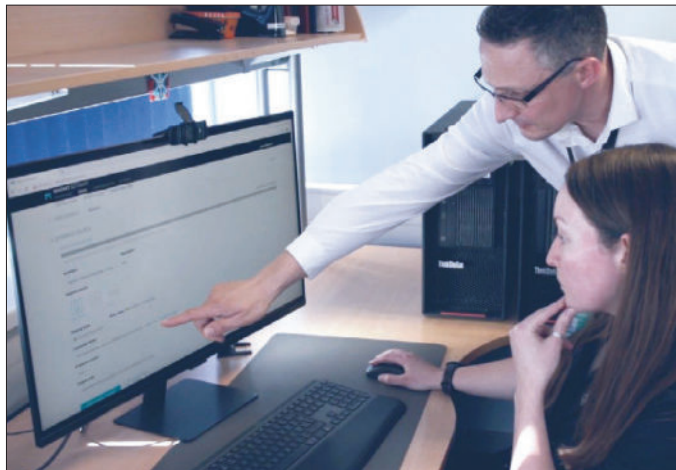
software begins the processing for a new case.

This frees digital investigators to focus on analysis during office hours and allows investigations to continue to advance during traditional downtime hours, says Magnet Forensics.

“Automate takes repetitive processing away and allows me to focus on other tasks,” says Ms Carey-Shields.

“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.

“Ultimately, these faster outcomes have a massive impact for victims.”



crimes.

“Now, more than 90 per cent of investigations have a digital element. The problem is that there is often too much digital evidence for police agencies to handle, which results in delays to investigations.

“Police agencies in the UK reportedly have a cumulative backlog of 20,000 devices that require examination, according to a recent Freedom of Information response.”

Jad Saliba, founder and chief technology officer of Magnet Forensics, said: “Police agencies worldwide are seeing major evidence bottlenecks form between the time that devices are collected in the field from witnesses,