Faster Mobilization, Better Response: How Durham Regional Police Leverage BlackBerry AtHoc

Durham Regional Police

Industry:
Public Safety

Location:
Ontario, Canada

Product:
BlackBerry® AtHoc®

Website:
www.drps.ca

A young man fails to return from a camping trip. A stolen vehicle causes a dangerous car accident. A domestic violence event results in multiple calls to the police.

These are just a few of the incidents that can occur under the watch of the DRPS, which serves the Region of Durham, a large upper-tier municipality situated just East of Toronto, Ontario. In a growing region made up of both urban and rural communities, response time is of the essence.

Defending a Highly Diverse Jurisdiction

As one of the ten largest municipal police services in Canada, the DRPS serves over 700,000 residents, employs over 1,200 officers and civilian staff, and operates nearly 400 vehicles. Because the Durham region encompasses everything from heavily populated urban centers to remote northern forests, DRPS also maintains multiple highly specialized units.

"The diversity of the Durham Region requires many different styles of policing, resources, access times, and tactics – it's one of our biggest challenges," explains Paul Hallett, an Inspector at Durham Regional Police Service. "On the one hand, we have urban areas with a high concentration of crime and disorder. On the other, there are people who live in very rural, forested areas."

This challenge has been further exacerbated by Durham Region's rapid population growth over the past several years – Oshawa, for instance, is currently the fastest-growing community in Canada.

Navigating a Fragmented Communication Chain

Prior to 2017, DRPS's Communications / 911 staff relied primarily on group texts and emails to mobilize and inform first responders during critical incidents. Unfortunately, issuing notifications and collecting feedback was a highly manual process that required constant attention. Even as operators invented shortcuts to make the system more responsive, they found themselves struggling to maintain accurate lists and ensure consistent information delivery.

"We continually strive to look at how we can improve our operational communications and identify innovative tools that will enhance our response time in critical moments," says Christine Robson, IT Manager at DRPS.

To enhance the process of communication, DRPS deployed BlackBerry® AtHoc®, a critical event management solution developed specifically for the needs of public sector agencies.

The Right Messages at the Right Time

DRPS initially implemented BlackBerry AtHoc for 80 first responders, with alerting capabilities via phone, email, SMS, and mobile. This allowed operators within the organization's 911 operations emergency dispatch center to not only share information across multiple departments, but also to collect information from field personnel and ensure their safety. Following its initial success, DRPS added another 120 users to the system.

Since then, the organization has significantly expanded its AtHoc deployment, and now manages the mobilization of 19 different specialty units via AtHoc, including:

- Criminal Investigations
- Domestic Violence
- Drug Enforcement
- Forensic Identification
- Fraud
- Guns and Gangs
- Homicide
- Hostage Negotiation
- Incident Command
- K-9
- Marine
- Mental Health
- Mobile Command
- Offender Management

"The bottom line is that BlackBerry AtHoc is an effective way for our communications team to activate callouts. You don't have time to sift through phone trees or email chains during a critical incident – there are too many other things going on. With AtHoc, everything is right there at their fingertips, and all they need to do is press one button."

– Paul Hallett,
Inspector, DRPS

- Public Safety / Search & Rescue

- Robbery

- Special Victims

- Tactical Support

- Traffic Management

"For each unit on AtHoc, we have a primary and a secondary list, based on the unit's own schedule and reporting structure," explains Hallett. "When there's an incident, our operators simply pull up the needed distribution list and push out an alert to them for a primary callout. If they don't receive a response in five minutes, they do the same thing with a secondary list — it's become our preferred method of mobilization when we need to bring in specialized personnel."

Saving People by Saving Time

Feedback around BlackBerry AtHoc has been highly positive, notes Hallett. Operators are pleased that they no longer must contend with phone trees and email chains — they can simply push a single button to issue whatever callouts are necessary. First responders, meanwhile, appreciate how much more efficiently information is both distributed and received.

"AtHoc has been universally valuable in the amount of time and attention it's saved our supervisors," says Hallett. "Incidents that require special resources can be really hectic — being able to immediately activate those units takes away a huge burden."

For more information, visit BlackBerry.com/Athoc and follow @AtHoc on Twitter.

About BlackBerry

BlackBerry (NYSE: BB; TSX: BB) provides intelligent security software and services to enterprises and governments around the world. The company secures more than 500M endpoints including 150M cars on the road today. Based in Waterloo, Ontario, the company leverages AI and machine learning to deliver innovative solutions in the areas of cybersecurity, safety and data privacy solutions, and is a leader in the areas of endpoint security management, encryption, and embedded systems. BlackBerry's vision is clear — to secure a connected future you can trust.

For more information, visit BlackBerry.com and follow @BlackBerry.

BlackBerry.

Intelligent Security. Everywhere.