UMS delivers its first community messaging system in the UK, to a police force that supports the largest population in the East of England, Essex Police.
Recipients are able to choose from a variety of channels including email, SMS and voice calls to be kept informed of alerts pertaining their area. Within just a few months, 7,000 active registrants have already signed up for this crime prevention service. This number is expected to rapidly increase.

Other than through their media department, Essex Police did not have a joint approach to the delivery of corporate messages. At a local level, neighbourhood policing teams communicated with their communities through neighbourhood action panels, forums, local meetings and to a lesser degree, through social media.

Various networks had been established over the years around business and retail communities, farming groups, licensees, voluntary organisations and other partners. However, these were separate systems that required administration and support, lacking a consistent approach from one group to the next. Connecting with these networks and engaging with the public was identified as a key requirement to improving community engagement and crime prevention.

Having met and considered the leading providers in the communications market, after a rigorous tendering process UMS was chosen as the successful tenderer.

**REQUIREMENTS**

Essex Police required an online interactive two-way messaging system to deliver specific messages to targeted groups and geographic areas to convey text, email and voice mail. The system needed to be simple and allow the police and its partners to warn and inform the communities across the county using appropriate engagements tactics in a cost effective way. The system needed to be simple and allow the Police and its partners to warn and inform the communities across the county using appropriate engagements tactics, in a cost effective way.

This had been the subject of discussion and debate for some time within the Neighbourhood Watch Group following the demise of a historic system and had become a priority concern as the concepts of predictive policing, active citizen and capable guardianship have been embraced by Chief Officers. From consultations with representatives from partners, community groups and watch schemes, there was a clear desire to have an efficient messaging system that provides timely, relevant information to the recipient to bring about significant
outcomes in relation to enhanced membership, coverage, intelligence, promoting neighbourhood policing and crime prevention.

COMMUNITY MESSAGING SYSTEM
Our community messaging system had met all the requirements for Essex Police and had introduced additional functions that will supplement crime prevention in Essex. A multitude of channels were provided to fully reach and involve all members of the community, this incorporated the use of email, SMS, voice call, social media, web publishing and push notifications within the application.

The key focus in design was simplicity. Our platform had to be intuitive for IT users of all levels: our quick five step sending process is a testament of our ease of use:

1. Name of the alert
2. Select recipients
3. Select channel
4. Compose message
5. Send

From the very start, UMS had recognised Essex Police’s existing electoral wards, sub-wards and district metered areas (DMA) and ensured that the boundaries and data would be fully integrated onto the mapping system. Map selection is self-explanatory; using maps provided by Google, circular or customised polygon selections can be saved for later use including selecting pre-assigned DMAs. Geo-fencing technologies incorporates these boundaries by sending alerts to users who enter a designated area, a perfect feature for location-enabled devices.

An important aspect was the ability for two-way communication to be enabled or disabled before a sending, so that an appeal for information can be easily replied through a user’s preferred channel whereas a general announcement would not require responses.

As a communications company we are fully aware of the risks of channel congestion and the dependency of telecommunications especially in times of emergency, which is exactly the reason why we have patented technology to prevent overloading on any communication network.

REVOLUTIONARY MOBILE APPLICATION
An additional feature we had introduced to Essex Police was the necessity of an App, in order to future proof the solution and incorporate a wider community, the existence of an app would bridge and engage the community on a larger scale. The benefits of real-time location based

“Essex Community Messaging will get key crime and crime prevention information out to communities faster than ever before. It will also improve the two-way flow of information about community safety between Essex Police, neighbourhood and other watch groups, and the people of Essex”.

Nick Alston, Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex
alerts provided an effective and relevant alerting system that doesn’t just target stationary addresses where recipients may or may not be present. With the introduction of geo-fencing, community engagement has naturally increased as this has provided relatable information based on users interests.

More significantly, the App had allowed Essex Police to benefit from free messaging, diverting messaging costs from traditional channels such as SMS and voice calls.

**COLLABORATION WITH UMS**

Essex Police and UMS had worked very closely together to produce a bespoke system adhering to the requirements. Our consistent project meetings produced many new ideas that were formed to create the most effective tool in community messaging.

During App development, Essex Police contributed greatly on both the design and functionality of the App, including highlighting many potential uses for tackling crime and day-to-day operating policing that have been implemented because of our interactions. Due to time commitments and minimal resources, Essex Police were unable to host support for both internal and external enquiries for their system. Despite not having previously agreed on any conditions regarding external support, a local number was set up by UMS to which has been published on all Essex Police sources to handle support calls. UMS has been answering phone enquiries since and will continue to provide assistance even after Essex’s internal support team is established as their backup level of expertise. UMS provided a high level of support and commitment and went beyond the contract to support their client at no additional cost.

Our devotion was also apparent when on-site training was provided in addition during the weekends, to accommodate for the availability of neighbourhood watch members’ schedules. UMS’ dedicated support staff travelled to their preferred locations and presented demonstrations at again, no extra cost and with provisions outside of the contract.

Overall, the community messaging system was a success and our favourable experience with Essex Police has provided a benchmark to all UK police forces with more forces looking to advocate our robust systems. As the first organisation in the UK to adopt a UMS system, this has positively unlocked opportunities throughout the UK.

“We’re delighted that we now have a brand new messaging system, and look forward to improving our ability to help Essex Police reduce the level of crime across our county.”

Alan Johnson, Chair of the Essex County Neighbourhood Watch Association

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Unified Messaging Systems AS • www.umsalert.com
Innspurten 15, 0663 OSLO • Pb. 6301, Etterstad, 0604 OSLO, Norway

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