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# Paperwork is Painful (and Expensive) in Police Work. **IS THERE A BETTER WAY?**

We put a man on the moon  
and computers in our pockets.  
We can solve the nightmare  
of manual data entry.

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**D**o police officers seek law enforcement careers because they love paperwork? Not likely. While accurate reporting is a critical component of good police work, the task of writing and filing reports can often be the bane of many officers' existence.

Paperwork can also be costly and time consuming. Case in point: The Redlands Police Department in California used to spend \$96,000 per year on dictation and transcription services for police reports. After this money was cut from the department's budget, officers transcribed the reports themselves. "Officers had to spend more time typing, meaning less time on investigations and patrol," said Lt. Travis Martinez of the Redlands Police.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, at the Rogers Police Department in Minnesota, clerical staff at one time logged about 23 hours of overtime each week to transcribe officers' reports and get them to the Hennepin County Attorney by 9 a.m. on Monday — a mandatory deadline under Minnesota's 36-Hour Rule for arraigning suspects taken into custody.<sup>2</sup>

While records management systems (RMS) have increased efficiency at many police departments, the techniques officers commonly use to input information still impose a tremendous burden.

**Officers had to spend more time typing, meaning less time on investigations and patrol."**

— Lt. Travis Martinez, Redlands Police Department

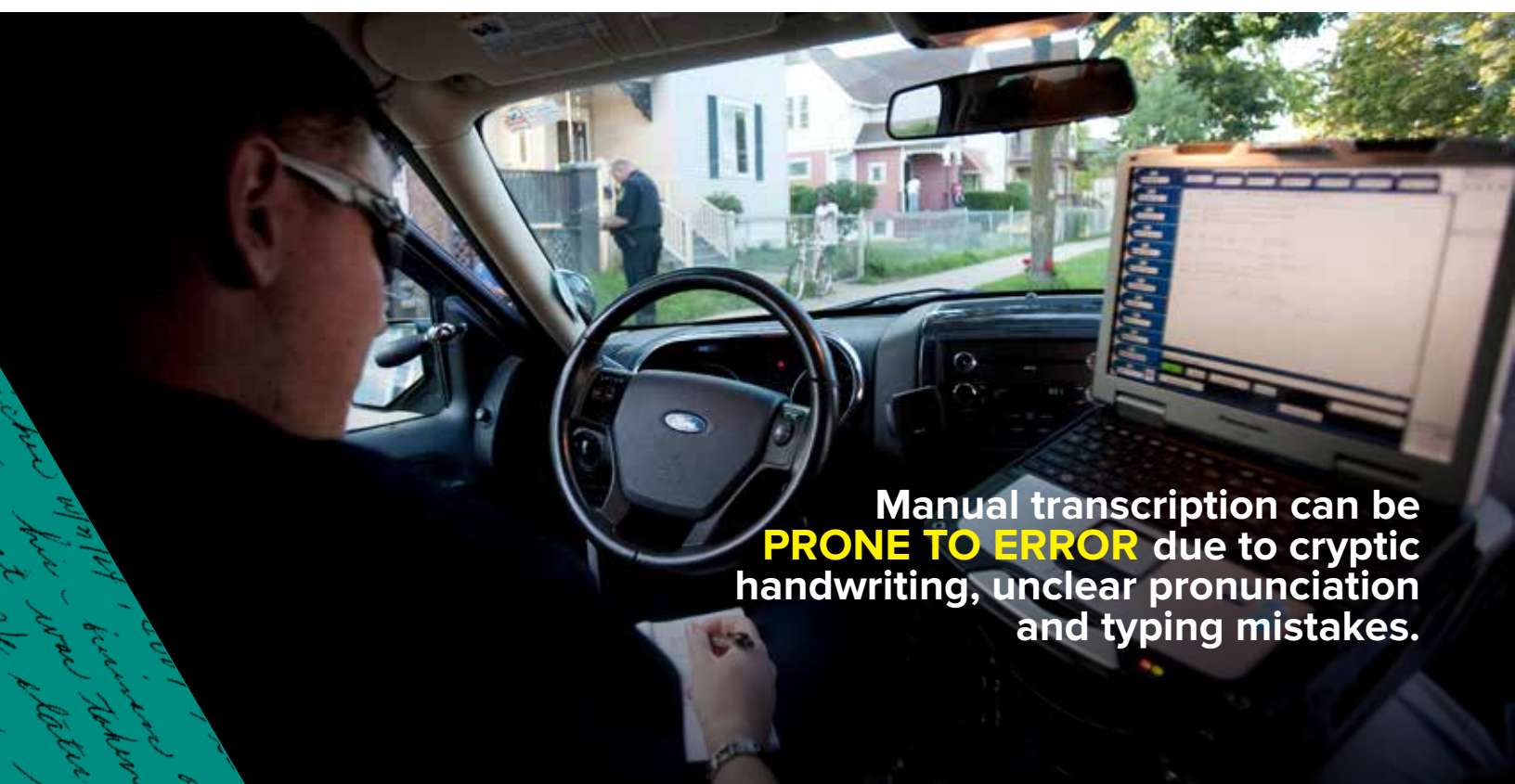
### **Manual Data Entry: Inefficient, Inaccurate and Ineffective**

In 2008, the United Kingdom's Inspectorate of Constabulary found that police sergeants spent 45 percent of their time on paperwork.<sup>3</sup> Today, the situation is largely the same, with similar results in America. The typical police incident report can take up to two hours to complete.

"Some of our officers are responsible for 5 to 10 pages of reports in a day," said Officer James Perz of Florida's Clearwater Police Department.<sup>4</sup>

The time officers spend on paperwork is time they can't spend protecting the public. After an encounter, many officers handwrite notes in the field and then return to their desks to type the same information into the department's RMS. Other officers give handwritten or dictated notes to support staff or a transcription service, delaying reports and increasing costs. When reports take too long to complete, justice goes unserved. In states with strict deadlines for filing police reports, such as Minnesota, a late document may require police to release a criminal suspect.

Some officers type directly into the RMS from the field via the mobile computer installed in their vehicle. However, an officer bent over a keyboard can't pay attention to what's going on outside the car — creating a lack of situational awareness that may put the officer in danger. Manual transcription can also be prone to error due to cryptic handwriting, unclear pronunciation and typing mistakes. Because the process is cumbersome and deadlines are tight, supervisors may not have ample



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time to ensure reports are accurate and thorough. These mistakes can cost prosecutors convictions.

### The Speech Solution

To address these problems, some police departments are deploying speech recognition technology to automatically transform dictated reports into text. An officer can speak directly into the system on a computer — in the office or in the field — or dictate into a digital recorder and then upload the audio file for transcription. Users also save time by using spoken commands.

Most speech recognition software can be customized to recognize any user's voice and pronunciation, as well as department-specific terms, abbreviations and acronyms. Professional speech recognition software is up to 99 percent accurate out of the box, and training and customization improve that performance even further. As a text entry tool, speech is three times faster than typing.<sup>5</sup>

### Key Benefits of Speech Recognition

#### Speed Report Preparation

Speech recognition vastly reduces the time it takes to produce police reports. For the Clearwater Police Department, the technology reduced report writing time by more than 50 percent, according to Perz. "With its ability to get officers back on the street, it's a great asset for any agency," he said.

In Rogers, Minn., speech recognition software improved report preparation so staff no longer strain to meet the state's strict deadline. "By cutting transcription out of the process, we now have all our reports packaged and submitted by 8:15 on Monday morning," said Jeffrey Beahan, chief of police and agency administrator.<sup>6</sup>

#### Improve Documentation Detail

Officers can record reports in the field, while the information is fresh in their minds, capturing detailed and accurate descriptions. As the technology reduces the paperwork burden, officers and support staff can be more productive and focus on mission-critical activities.

#### Save on Money and Overtime

A police department in Colorado estimates savings of \$195,000 every year because it no longer pays a transcription service.<sup>7</sup> And remember the overtime the Rogers Police Department incurred each week as clerical staff labored over officers' reports? Speech recognition software has eliminated that cost altogether.

#### Increase Report Accuracy

Speech recognition software reduces the risk of liability due to missed deadlines and erroneous documentation. With help from a professional speech recognition solution, officers can focus on enforcing the law and keeping the public safe.

## Savings by the Numbers



### Police departments around the country are reaping the benefits of speech recognition technology.

Redlands Police Department reduced transcription services costs by **\$96,000 per year.**

Rogers Police Department no longer spends **23 hours of overtime** each week transcribing reports.

Clearwater Police Department reduced report writing time by more than **50 percent.**

A Colorado police department estimates **annual savings of \$195,000.**

*This piece was developed and written by the Emergency Management custom media division, with information and input from Nuance Communications.*

### Endnotes

1. <http://www.statetechmagazine.com/article/2011/08/speak-out>
2. [http://www.nuance.com/ucmprod/groups/corporate/@web-enus/documents/webasset/rogers\\_pd\\_case\\_study.pdf](http://www.nuance.com/ucmprod/groups/corporate/@web-enus/documents/webasset/rogers_pd_case_study.pdf)
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