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Electronic traffic citations: How to deploy the right solution for your agency

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By Jack Siney, Chief Operating Officer
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Many of today's law enforcement agencies are struggling to balance the increasing demand from its citizens for more service with limited and/or declining budgets. One of the easiest and most cost-effective ways agencies can address this issue is by deploying an electronic ticketing solution. Automating the ticket issuing and processing system can significantly decrease cost, increase productivity and improve officer safety.

During most of the past 30 years, electronic ticketing has been limited mainly to a municipality's parking division, with parking enforcement officers utilizing a handheld device to issue parking violations. With advancements in software and hardware in recent years, the focus of electronic ticketing initiatives is now to automate the issuance of traffic and moving violations across the board.

Today, there are many electronic ticketing options available to law enforcement agencies. Agencies should evaluate carefully various solutions and their providers against a number of criteria, including agency needs, budget requirements, etc. A primary measurement is to determine the impact or return on investment (ROI) an eTicketing solution will have on their agency.

Return on Investment: Why Deploy an eTicketing Solution?

There are several ways to measure what the impact or ROI an electronic ticketing solution will have on an agency. Some agencies are focused on one main variable, while others measure the effect the solution will have on their entire system. Below are several of the major factors to consider when measuring the ROI for deploying an eTicketing solution:

1. Increased Productivity: Today, most patrol officers can issue a moving violation with a standard multi-part ticket form in approximately 10 to 15 minutes. With an electronic ticketing solution, officers are able to issue a ticket in two to three minutes. This time-savings – when applied to each of the patrol officers who conduct traffic stops each day – results in an enormous increase in productivity. For example, if an agency has 20 patrol officers who each issue five traffic citations per day, with just a five-minute time-savings per citation, the result during just one year is an increase of more than 1,600 hours of patrol time.

2. Increased Accuracy: In national studies regarding the accuracy of the data contained on traffic citations, approximately 10 to 20 percent of citations have been found to contain errors, with some regions/agencies experiencing error rates as high as 35 percent. In most municipalities, these types of errors "invalidate" the citation; hence, the citation and its associated fine are dismissed and the appropriate municipality does not receive any of the revenue for this citation. Using an electronic ticketing solution eliminates the typical errors associated with handwritten citations, and significantly reduces the number of citations dismissed by the courts. Assuming just a 10 percent reduction in the citation error rate applied to 20,000 citations that have an average fine amount of \$50, the amount of additional revenue that will be collected each year is \$100,000.

3. Increased Efficiency: Once a citation has been issued, most agencies are typically required to provide the citation data to three database/reporting systems, including 1) the police records system, 2) the court case management system, and 3) the state's citation tracking system. Today, most agencies handle this process by sending carbon copies of the original citation to the three entities and data-entry clerks manually type the requisite citation data into their system. This process is costly, time-consuming and often back-logged. It also increases the error rate in the data due to manual data entry errors.

With an electronic ticketing system, all of the data from the citation form can be electronically transferred to the necessary back-end system(s). Assuming just three data-entry clerks paid \$30,000 per year are utilized to enter data in the requisite systems, the cost-savings the first day the eTicketing system is deployed is \$90,000. And, the data is immediately available in the database/records systems.

4. Increased Safety: Roadside traffic stops are the second most deadly incidents encountered by law enforcement officers (second only to domestic violence incidents). One of the major contributors



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to the high death rate for traffic stops is the prolonged period of time officers are on the side of the road. The longer a traffic stop lasts, the higher likelihood an officer is injured by a passing motorist or violator who becomes agitated due to the long delay. An electronic ticketing solution enables officers to clear traffic stops three to five times faster – significantly increasing officer safety.

Once an agency has decided to move forward with an electronic ticketing initiative, there are two types of eTicketing solutions to consider: eTicketing for mobile computers/laptops and eTicketing for mobile handheld devices.

Electronic Ticketing for Mobile Computers

With awareness of handheld devices being higher, many law enforcement agencies may not realize that there is an electronic ticketing solution that can be added easily to the mobile computers/laptops in their patrol vehicles. In fact, deploying an eTicketing system on new or existing computers is even more cost-effective and seamless than deploying handheld devices.

With the mobile computers, officers can utilize the keyboard to type data into the requisite fields on the citation or scan it in from the driver's license and vehicle registration of the violator.

The data from the driver's license and/or registration is scanned into the eTicketing application by swiping the magnetic stripe on the back of the driver's license or reading the barcode that is printed on these documents.

Some software applications will even save the officer the step of swiping the driver's license. When a mobile query is conducted through NCIC, a state or local database, the electronic citation is auto-populated with all the requisite data, allowing the officer to issue a ticket in under a minute.

Most mobile computers can operate with either a thermal printer or high-impact printer. But agencies should be familiar with their state requirements regarding the printer they must use. As of early 2007, only 26 states authorize the use of alternative/thermal ticket printouts. Before choosing a printer, agencies should contact their state to determine the requirements.

Electronic Ticketing for Handheld Devices

Electronic ticketing solutions for PDA/handheld devices have been around for many years, but were mostly focused on parking enforcement initiatives. The additional data and increased complexity of a traffic enforcement citation previously had prevented the wide use of handheld solutions to issue traffic violations – until now. Advancements in both the functionalities of the handheld software applications and features of new handheld devices have significantly increased the use and deployment of the handheld solutions for traffic citations.

Currently, almost all of the available handheld ticketing solutions rely on an officer scanning the barcode or swiping the magnetic stripe on the violator's driver's license in order to populate some of the fields on the citation form. In addition, some solutions support the ability to scan the barcode on the vehicle registration card. Both the scanning and swiping capabilities are conducted with a driver's license reader that is connected to the handheld device. Officers then utilize drop-down menus and/or small keyboard to complete the citation. This basic set of functionalities can require as many as 35 to 50 clicks.

Some software applications enable even fewer clicks. If the software is customized for the agency, providing embedded intelligence and drop-down menus with specific information related to their municipality, then issuing a citation will take as few as 8 to 10 clicks.

Handheld devices range from non-ruggedized consumer PDA devices to highly rugged devices. All of the handheld systems utilize a small thermal printer to print citations.

A majority of thermal printers are stand-alone units that connect to the handheld device, utilizing a wireless connection.

Criteria for Evaluating Electronic Ticketing Solutions

Once an agency has considered the potential ROI and evaluated the electronic ticketing equipment options, there are five major factors that should be considered prior to making a final decision. They include:

Overall Functionality of the System: Agencies should review all features and functionalities offered within the proposed system and ensure the vendor has previously deployed them for a sufficient number of agencies.

Ease-of-Use: Although it is not that difficult to build an electronic form, it is very difficult to create an electronic form that is customized, easy-to-use and can be implemented in a timely manner.

Total System Cost: Agencies need to evaluate both the initial cost of the system and the ongoing support/maintenance costs. Particularly with some of the customized hardware solutions, support and supplies for proprietary hardware can become very expensive. In addition, agencies should ensure they are going to utilize all of the functionalities they request. Eliminating unnecessary items, such as scanners, wireless capabilities and ruggedization standards, can significantly reduce the overall system cost.

Integrates with Agency's Technology Infrastructure: One of the key items to consider when evaluating an eTicketing solution is whether it has the flexibility to work with the agency's current technology infrastructure and the capability to expand as the agency expands. It is

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particularly important that the eTicketing solution can interface with the installed RMS, court and state systems or planned new systems.

Customer Support: Agencies must ensure they are going to receive the necessary assistance during the implementation process as well as ongoing support throughout the duration of the program. In addition, a clear definition of items included in the maintenance/support plan needs to be established so agencies are not "nickel-and-dimed" for future changes and modifications.

As law enforcement agencies continue to meet increasing demands, they are turning to technology-based resources to help perform their jobs more efficiently, productively and safely. As agencies make this important transformation, they will need to carefully evaluate their needs, budget and tools available. More and more agencies are doing just this and realizing the enormous impact an electronic ticketing solution can have on every aspect of their jobs.

For a free online demo, for APS electronic citations solutions, [click here](#).

Jack Siney is the Chief Operating Officer of Advanced Public Safety which creates innovative technology solutions specifically designed to address the challenges of today's law enforcement and public safety agencies. Since its inception, APS has provided its technology solutions to more than 20,000 law enforcement officers throughout North America



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