



Forensic Management Information Tool (F-MIT)

Exploiting effective management information is critical to ensuring that police forces receive value for money in the new forensic science market. This case study explains how F-MIT supports this capability.

Background

Since 2002 when the Forensic Science Service (FSS) stopped being the only supplier of forensic services for police forces in the England Wales the number of private companies providing those services has increased significantly. The management of contracts with these companies is handled by two teams; the West Coast Consortium (WCC) management team and the Home Office Forensic Marketplace management team.

Accurate management information is critical to enabling these teams to fulfil their roles. Timely provision of forensic evidence can be vital to the success of police forces' criminal investigations. Delivery of the contracts therefore needs to be monitored to ensure that contracted service levels are met. Understanding cost variances and ensuring services are priced correctly also helps ensure that police forces receive value for money at a time when they are under increasing financial pressures.

Recognising these needs, and aware of Process Evolution through their forensic process improvement work, the WCC first approached Process Evolution in 2008 to develop a prototype system for managing delivery of the initial contracts. In 2009 Process Evolution were then commissioned by the Home Office to provide a fully-fledged national management information solution to enable both teams to manage their contracts effectively and to allow the Home Office team to monitor the overall forensic marketplace.

Solution

The solution, Forensic Management Information Tool (FMIT), is based on a relational database which enables it to capture and store the large volume of data required. This data includes a great deal of detail relating to each submission including the type of material submitted, the number of exhibits, the timing and type of services provided, the outcome of the analysis and the cost. As part of their contract, suppliers need to be able to provide the necessary data in a predefined format on a regular monthly basis.

FMIT is web-based so that users in the management teams as well as suppliers can gain access to it without the need for specialist equipment. The majority of suppliers extract data from their internal management system and upload it directly to FMIT using a dedicated portal. This process includes stringent validation so that the data in the system is as accurate as possible.

Once the data has been entered into the system it is available for analysis and reporting by the management team users. The main feature of the system is the ability to run bespoke queries and present the results graphically in chart form. This includes the ability to filter the data based on

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parameters such as date range, lot, supplier, force and outcome. There are a series of options which enable users to select different ways of grouping and colour coding the results. In addition the query results can be saved as image files or the data exported to Excel.

Benefits

There are a number of benefits to using FMIT, particularly in relation to assisting with contract management and performance monitoring of the Suppliers as well as helping Forces better understand their supplier's service provision. Key benefits include:

- Direct data capture from Suppliers (often automated) preventing the forces from having to do any data collection/collation themselves.
- Monthly data uploads to FMIT giving access to 'live' information on all previously delivered cases.
- Ability to drill down into data detail allowing analysis of turnaround times, correct contractual allocations, price variations, national spend, savings and market shares.
- From a national perspective, ability to build up a picture of good practice around the country and disseminate lessons learned.
- Web based application allowing FMIT access from any internet connection without any specialist software or hardware.
- Compliance with Information Assurance National Policing Accreditation protocols.

John Armstrong (Head of the Home Office Forensic Marketplace Team)...” the development of FMIT has not been easy but now that we have a working system in place it is difficult to see how we ever managed before. It has quickly become a very useful system indeed and paying dividends in helping manage the national forensic marketplace. A close working partnership has developed with Process Evolution whom I have found to be very knowledgeable, proactive, extremely flexible in approach and a joy to work with “

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