



Doing Prison Time

Interoperability, information sharing, and timeline and link analysis are buzzwords getting a great deal of use in the law enforcement and homeland security communities. Now the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections is capitalizing on a software program called WebTAS, originally designed for government agencies and law enforcement, to show that these buzzwords also have meaning for corrections.

Short for Web-Enabled Timeline Analysis System, WebTAS is a flexible suite of analytical tools that enable public safety agencies to quickly and easily merge data from disparate databases or other sources of information. It uses an agency's existing mainframe system to track pertinent incidents.

"WebTAS is basically what we call 'government off the shelf,'" says Jamie Hepler, a contract analyst with the Law Enforcement Analysis Facility located at the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC)—Northeast, a program of the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice. The software gives analysts the ability to plot events spatially and temporally and look for links.

"You should see the look on the people's faces when the raw data they have been working with, but have never been able to see visualized, is first plotted on a map or grid for them," Hepler says. "It's just amazing, like 'where has this been all my life?'"

Originally, WebTAS was used in the defense and intelligence community, predominately for intelligence analysis by the United States Space Command. Currently, Hepler says, WebTAS is used to support tactical and strategic analysis in support of the global war on terrorism, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Law enforcement has also realized the software's potential to help analyze evidence. WebTAS, Hepler says, has even been featured on "He Said...She Said," one of the stories in the Autopsy 11: Sex, Lies, and Murder video series (HBO, Spring 2006).

Bob Flaherty, a security data analyst with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, says that although the Federal Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) of 2003 provided a trigger, his agency really just wanted to see what WebTAS could do in the corrections arena as a whole. The passage of PREA (which mandates that all State and local correctional agencies meet specific reporting requirements related to prison rape, sexual assault, and harassment) and the subsequent receipt of a grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, he says, allowed the corrections department to purchase needed equipment and begin exploring WebTAS' possibilities. (The grant primarily went to purchase new servers, computers capable of running the software, and minor consulting fees.)

When PREA came into play, Hepler says, Dr. John Shaffer, Pennsylvania executive deputy secretary for corrections, quickly recognized WebTAS' potential. Discussions began on making WebTAS fit into Pennsylvania's correctional intranet, called DOCNET. One requirement was that State employees would continue entering data into the various databases used by different correctional facilities and WebTAS would connect all these varied data sources together.

"It's been a great system," Flaherty says. "We took it in baby steps by looking first at rapes; now we're expanding it to other types of sexual activity, assaults, and misconducts. We want to try to build up the analysis aspect, but so far, the number of PREA incidents has been so low that we haven't been able to do much analysis."

Now that Pennsylvania knows about WebTAS, Flaherty says the State is working on other uses for the software. In addition to tracking nonsexual assaults and inmate misconduct, Flaherty thinks it could be a useful tool for combating gang activity and drug use.

"We'd also like to use it to analyze visitors, inmates, gangs, drug tests, and phone calls to visualize whether there are any linkages between these entities," Flaherty says. "It could help us keep drugs out of prison and the wrong people from being allowed to visit." WebTAS also

could help find patterns following canine and other contraband searches. "It will help us to pick up trends and call them to the attention of the administration."

While Pennsylvania examines ways to expand WebTAS use within its correctional system, Hepler says he hopes to expand WebTAS' correctional applications outside the State.

"I think every State has similar technology needs in terms of infrastructure and software requirements," he says. "One of my hopes is to establish its use in more States. All States must report under PREA, and it could also be used for inhouse investigations, visitor tracking, and intelligence and financial analysis—all the same problems that law enforcement faces. States could use WebTAS to share critical information and collaborate with each other. Once you've got it in place, it can be used for so many things. It helps you find the pattern before the pattern becomes a problem."

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For more information about WebTAS, visit www.webtas.com or contact Jamie Hepler at James.Hepler@rl.af.mil. For information about how WebTAS was used in one instance to help solve a murder-for-hire case, read "Time Proves the Crime" from the spring 2002 edition of TechBeat at www.justnet.org/techbeat/spring2002/TimeCrimeSpr02.pdf.



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