Defence & Public Safety

Building trust between citizens and the police in a digital world

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Securing the trust and confidence of the public is essential to delivering successful and effective policing and law enforcement anywhere in the world.

According to Sir Robert Peel's Nine Principles of Policing, "the power of the police to fulfill their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions, and behavior, and their ability to secure and maintain public respect." NYPD Police Commissioner, William Bratton, agrees that Peel's principles are as valid now as they were in 1829: "They are essential to healing the divisions that exist between the police and the community we serve." In today's multimedia world, with 24-hour news cycles and a wealth of data at their fingertips, citizens have plenty of evidence on which to base their opinions and, ultimately, decide whether they approve of—or trust—the police.

With recent polls indicating record lows for the American people's trust in their government, the justice system and the police, it is not surprising that citizens' lack of support for such essential institutions is dominating the headlines. Responsible for 10,000 police officers patrolling a city of four million people, Los Angeles Police Department's Chief, Charlie Beck, is clear about his department's priorities: "you just can't do it without public trust."

So how can the police assess and understand how their organizations and officers and staff are perceived by the public and whether the community supports their actions? How best can they use such insight to change and improve, restoring confidence and building trust? By using new digital tools to measure public perception, understand sentiment and visibly demonstrate commitment to learning from community feedback, police can not only secure the trust and approval of the public, but also maintain citizen satisfaction in the long term to deliver improved policing outcomes.

Understanding "How are we doing?"

Accenture believes that to measure citizen satisfaction more effectively, the police must engage the public through the use of tools and channels with which they are familiar—and use them to understand, shape and respond to public opinion. The publication of reduced crime rates is no match for instant YouTube videos, Tweets and Facebook photos. The rapid adoption and use of such digital technologies can, and with widespread impact, undermine traditional citizen satisfaction results.

Measuring public perception

Public perception of the police is no longer effectively gauged by issuing surveys and hoping a representative cross-section of the public responds. Understanding how the police are doing requires knowledge of the different communities served—and their priorities. Once the police can evaluate the perception of the police held by different segments of their communities, and identify which triggers are driving or changing that perception, they can target engagement with those communities more effectively.

Some individuals never interact with the police; some live in areas of perceived high crime and disorder, and some will be victims of crime—or perpetrators of it. These diverse public representatives can perceive the police completely differently and measured accordingly using a variety of tools.

What are the different segments of the communities you serve and what are their priorities? What is the perception of victims of crime of the service provided to them? Who are the vulnerable members of society and how safe do they feel? Are vulnerable members of the public being victimized publicly? Are criminals bragging about participation in recent criminal activity?

Take action

Customer insight tools can be used to understand how perception is generated, and who is influencing opinion. Digital technologies, such as social scanning and geo-tagging areas with the most feedback, by location or demographics, can follow trends and public sentiment within specific communities. Direct feedback channels—including digital, paper-based or face-to-face—can be used to seek feedback from those who have interacted with the police and analytics platforms can help interpret this information.

Proactively shaping sentiment

With so many digital channels available to influence public opinion, police leaders must recognize that they are vulnerable to being misunderstood if they do not join the conversation. Although 96 percent of citizens recently surveyed want to play a role in police services, 68 percent said they do not receive enough information from their local police. Police officers must understand the impact of not approaching conversations or specific types of social media channels correctly and seek to different types of engagement.

Social media success is less about quantity and more about the quality of engagement between citizens and the police. To proactively shape sentiment, police organizations must tailor their engagement efforts to different community segments using a variety of channels and recognize that one size does not fit all. The Accenture United States Citizen Survey found that although more than two-thirds of citizens support the use of digital technologies to increase police effectiveness and communication, only 7 percent of adults above the age of 55 preferred more digital or technology initiatives.

Understanding engagement preferences is crucial. Thames Valley Police in the United Kingdom is using customer insight data and analysis tools to move away from generic media campaigns toward two-way, local engagement and communications. This targeted engagement means that police must use a variety of channels, not only digital, to reflect their diverse community segments. The "coffee with a cop" program in South Carolina, United States, which encourages a more traditional face to face two-way dialogue between police and members of the public is one example. Alternatively, during the Marathon Bombing in 2013, the Boston Police Department reached a mass audience by operating a 24-hour "digital hub" for information. The department's tweets "rapidly became the most trusted source of information about the status of the investigation and were often retweeted hundreds, thousands or tens of thousands of times."

The police must recognize, too, the willingness of communities to support them—96 percent of citizens expect to play a role in policing and 66 percent want more police interaction. Traditional Neighborhood Watch groups are being supplemented with digital equivalents such as Nextdoor—a free and private social network for neighborhoods used in more than 58,000 communities across the United States. Similarly, FaceWatch is an online crime reporting platform in the United Kingdom that enables businesses, public and police to tackle low-level crime by sharing images within secure groups and submitting digital evidence files to the police to save time and increase the likelihood of detecting the crimes. The public wants to be involved in policing—and this involvement can serve the dual purpose of engaging the public and improving police outcomes.
Which channels are most effective and cost efficient for the different segments of the public? Have police engagement and communications efforts resulted in measurable outcomes? Do we emphasize the priority of community relations and interaction when recruiting and training officers?

**Take action**

Engagement strategies outline the potential channels—digital or otherwise—that should be used to target communications. Understanding objectives and listening carefully to the feedback from citizens and which channels they prefer helps to improve police social media capabilities. Proactive use of social media, targeted digital messaging, Web chat and online communities open up new channels for real-time engagement with the public.

**Demonstrating commitment to learning**

Perception of the police can change fast and a ground swell of opinion spreads rapidly. Police organizations need to be equally agile; they must visibly respond to feedback and address concerns or questions from the public to maintain their trust—while "constantly demonstrating absolutely impartial service to law."\(^{14}\)

Police organizations can use digital solutions to make transparent their law enforcement ethos and the way they conduct their work. Body-worn cameras are one example of digital public safety solutions being used to improve transparency, proving benefits for both the public and in terms of police conduct—our survey found that 80 percent of citizens are in favor of the police using wearable devices.\(^{15}\)

Building community relations continues to be a priority. As Charlie Beck, LAPD Chief, says: "Policing will always be a people business." Officers must be trained in new ways to engage communities, not only to improve public perception, but also for the dual purpose of preventing and investigating crime. Officer skills are crucial here, and the approach must include training for both face-to-face interaction with the public and the ability to engage with digital channels.

Despite best efforts, there will undoubtedly be challenges around public opinion. Whether negative feedback is triggered by media noise or the genuine mistake of an officer, the police must visibly respond—but not react. Police must demonstrate their objectivity in assessing their own limitations, and learn from them. Again, transparency is key. Using social media, the police can

respond quickly and easily to comments and questions from the public. More important, they can evidence change in behavior, culture or regulation. As Superintendent Paulo Valente Gomes, National Commissioner of the Portuguese National Police, says: "It is easier for a police force that presents itself as modern, agile and highly-reputed to be effective and obtain acceptance from the population."\(^{16}\)

Do you prioritize community relations and are your officers trained accordingly? What culture or policy changes are required to incentivize officers to use digital technologies to actively engage with communities? Are you listening to what is happening on social media channels?

Do you have a content strategy in place that balances informative messages with crowd-sourcing public opinions? Do you have processes in place to manage feedback or prevent a crisis? How, and through which channels, do you communicate change?

**Success with satisfaction**

Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in the United Kingdom commented that: "We police with consent...My job is to...secure the support of the public for the changes we need to make to transform our organization to cope with the new threats that face us."\(^{17}\) Hogan-Howe is clear that he needs to engage the public he serves to generate their support and consent for how the MPS wages a "total war on crime."\(^{18}\)

Effective policing demands public trust and engagement. Gaining that trust and engagement goes beyond reducing crime levels—it involves, in Police Commissioner Bratton’s words, holding "cops and commands accountable for how safe their communities feel, not just how safe they are."\(^{19}\) By better understanding the priorities and preferences of different segments of society and embracing targeted, multi-channel digital and face-to-face communication strategies, police forces can build trust and gain support from the public, putting officers in a stronger position to cope more effectively with unprecedented change and new threats.

**Take action**

Define an annual content strategy. Prioritize training for new engagement methods and tools. Develop dedicated digital communication and engagement channels—put in place policies that mitigate negative feedback and highlight positive responses. Adopt the use of tools to increase transparency and demonstrate leadership commitment to learning from feedback.

**LIFE SCIENCES**

A life science products company wanted to know exactly what was being said about their brand in a sports event that they were sponsoring. Accenture Digital’s social media analytics service was able to discover what customers and potential customers really thought and was also able to spot that the social media profiles were not the company’s target audience. Accenture Digital was able to establish firm recommendations based on the findings to ensure the brand’s audience was who they wished to target to increase sales and interaction within the desired consumer demographic.

**FOOD & BEVERAGE**

Nestlé Oceania wanted to better understand what was being said about its key brands on social media. In doing so, the company wanted to better connect with its customers and be on the forefront in dealing with any negative perceptions of its products. Accenture Digital was engaged to deliver a comprehensive social media listening service; to better understand share of voice, run more effective campaigns, support the creation of a new social media centre of excellence and proactively resolve emerging issues. To drive this initiative, Accenture Digital deployed a mixed local and offshore model to give Nestlé Oceania deep, locally relevant analytics-driven insights in a cost-effective manner, leveraging cutting-edge technologies and processes.

**FINANCIAL SERVICES**

UBS has engaged Accenture Digital’s social media analytic services to receive competitor, campaign and reputation analysis insights. The analytic service monitors and identifies social media profiles, images and videos that are potentially damaging to the brand, together with the impact of campaigns and events across a variety of different social media channels. UBS defines what it is looking to achieve, and the Accenture team of experts identify the correct sources, verify the relevancy, analyze the data and draw recommendations to feed back data insights into UBS’s business to help position the company in the best way possible.
References

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