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# Digital disruption in public safety

*A digital policing summit held recently in London brought together public safety and thought leaders from across the UK and overseas to discuss the challenges and opportunities arising from digital disruption. James Slessor, who leads Accenture's Public Safety business writes on the outcomes from the summit and of the shared-experiences of industry attendees.*

The causes of disruption are numerous and complex; with every new technology comes new threats—whether that is 3D printed firearms or the use of cryptocurrencies to buy and sell contraband across borders.

Data is often driving that disruption. As citizens share more personal details online, they increase their vulnerability to being targeted by criminal groups. Data also exposes public safety agencies, too—in particular, the challenging volume and variety of data that public safety agencies must now deal with. And as the public become more tech-savvy, their demands for rapid and tailored services grows. All these pressures combine to put a strain on how public safety agencies maintain legitimacy and public trust.

At a Digital Policing Summit recently held in London, 60 public safety leaders, academics and industry

thought leaders from across the world came together to share ideas and discuss solutions to meet the challenges of delivering public safety in a digitally disrupted age. And as they discovered over the course of two days, digital disruption is not in fact the latest threat to their operations—it is rather an opportunity to help address today's and tomorrow's threats.

By channelling digital disruption into new ways of policing, agencies can not only fight crime, but also better manage public safety incidents.

Summit attendees identified five core themes to help them harness the power of these new, digital technologies:

**Apply data and technology to enable insight-driven policing:**

More data has been created in the past two years than in the entire previous history of the human race—yet only a fraction of that data belongs to public safety agencies. The ability to sort, analyse and identify what is important from high volumes of data cannot be underestimated. Organisations, such as Europol, offer collaborative and integrated platforms to exchange, analyse and exploit data for the benefit of public safety.

Having the right data at the right time (and secured in the right way) can better protect police officers and citizens. Using powerful analytics solutions, the police can capture and share crime details quicker and better analyse data to understand crime and prevent it from happening. Officers can benefit from actionable insights as they respond to incidents with real-time information via mobile devices or social media, while gaining the ability to make more informed decision-making in the field. Scalable storage capabilities, and the flexible processing power of the cloud, can help analyse huge volumes of data on demand. Today, by partnering with the private sector, public safety agencies can access secure cloud computing services and artificial intelligence capabilities at highly competitive rates, using technologies that previously had been out of reach for many agencies.

**Keep legitimacy at the heart of police culture:**

The personal relationship between citizens and the police has changed, not least because today's "local Bobby on the beat" is often supplemented with citizen self-service portals and emergency call centre numbers. Legitimacy and public trust continue to be essential components of

sustainable public safety, especially as new digital tools offer enormous capability and power over the growing, global pool of diverse data. By using digital tools to improve the way officers collaborate, communicate and engage with the community, citizen trust and confidence can be maintained in new ways. With public trust and legitimacy at the heart of their operations, agencies will be better able to share data and resources and further break down the organisational silos that are inhibiting some aspects of the work done today. In the digital age, communications and information sharing between the public, police, courts, local government, and third party and voluntary sectors must be transparent and accessible to reinforce trust and understanding, between agencies and with citizens.

**Bridge skills gaps and capabilities:**

As with any other public safety agency, public safety agencies are aware they must invest in training to upskill and reskill existing employees—especially to prepare for the demands of the digital age. New people with different skillsets will be needed, including those who might not have previously considered public safety as a career but who are capable of having an impact at all levels within an organisation. Public safety agencies should not shy away from this challenge. They should take heart from the fact that they are highly attractive employers who can offer exciting challenges and meaningful work—just the kind of incentives that younger professionals and graduates say they are looking for in their careers today.

The police are no strangers to programmes that can boost their manpower while involving the local community or other agencies. For instance, there are now more than 170,000 Neighbourhood Watch and Home Watch network schemes across England and Wales.

By increasing workforce numbers where and when needed, police services can access additional resources at busy times and better plan policing activities. Future public safety workforces will likely comprise a hybrid of digitally skilled, digitally confident employees, supplemented by specialists from the private sector, voluntary organisations and non-government organisations.

**Drive organizational agility:**

Disruption to organisations' traditional operating models brought about by new digital technologies is set to increase in the coming years as emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and biometrics come of age. Public safety agencies must be innovative, agile and prepared to adapt. A recent Accenture survey of 165 leaders within police, justice and intelligence agencies across nine countries (United States, Australia, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Norway, Singapore and the UK) found that a majority of police leaders (85 percent) are willing and ready to adopt and support the implementation of next-generation technologies. But significant barriers exist to implementation—notably the existence of outdated IT legacy systems, lack of internal skills, and an inability to hire the talent required to implement impactful technological change. To overcome these challenges police forces must make changes to their organisational structures and ways of working, while continuously assessing risk and reinforcing their relationship with the citizens they serve.

**Actively embrace new partnerships:**

From social care to education or health, the need to join forces to deliver an effective, rounded service is becoming more essential. Public Safety agencies are no exception.

Whether partnering to improve intelligence for frontline officers or taking advantage of the knowledge and experience of private sector or third sector organisations, modern public safety agencies cannot afford to ignore the benefits of greater collaboration. Digital technologies and platform-based operating models are proving the trend that at least many heads are better than one. Adaptable, scalable and interconnected public safety platforms can help to drive innovation and better capture, analyse and share data to inform real-time decision making. An Accenture survey found that police leaders are aware of the benefits that new technologies can bring. Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents said they are willing to embrace public-private partnerships and new commercial models (65 percent) and to consider “as-a-service” models for technology deployments (67 percent). By collaborating with universities, research institutes or private sector companies focused on innovation, police services can develop and, more importantly, implement, innovative solutions to operational challenges.

As demonstrated by the private sector, a “coalition of the connected” is called for to agree the international operating rules for combatting digital threats—to help tame cyberspace. Public safety agencies have a strong history of successful partnerships, but in the digital age must reach out to companies, groups and individuals they might not have considered in the past—and be prepared to invest for the benefit of other agencies within the public safety ecosystem.

### **The human touch**

Public safety is changing at pace, and with new threats needing more proactive, preventative, and less conventional solutions, the demand to release trapped value is becoming more pressing. The digital age offers increasingly affordable solutions that, with greater collaboration, can offer new ways to tackle these growing threats. And such solutions are a welcome backdrop to digital transformation, where public safety agencies need to win and maintain digital trust with the public. At the close of the two days, Digital Policing Summit attendees were encouraged and energized by the discussion and on one thing they were unanimously clear—whatever digital disruption may bring, public safety agencies will continue to offer the human touch, for the long term.