ARE POLICE FORCES MAXIMIZING TECHNOLOGY TO FIGHT CRIME AND ENGAGE CITIZENS?

THE ACCENTURE CITIZEN PULSE SURVEY ON POLICING
According to Accenture research, citizens want to help prevent and fight crime, but they also want greater access to information. Accenture’s survey of citizens across six countries found that 88 percent of citizens surveyed believe they are important participants in crime fighting, specifically citing that reporting crimes is a key role for citizens in police services.

However, the majority (84 percent) of citizens surveyed feel only minimally informed of local police activities. The survey findings identified a communication gap between citizens and police. However, the research also found a strong citizen belief that digital channels, particularly social media, can bridge the communication gap and increase citizen involvement in local policing efforts. Three quarters of all respondents said they would like to see police forces using more digital channels to communicate with citizens, yet only 20 percent of respondents said their police forces are currently using digital channels to communicate.

So how are police reaching out? According to the survey, citizens say that police continue to rely heavily on traditional media channels including newspapers (69 percent) and radio or television news reports (45 percent) as their primary method of communicating with citizens. The value of traditional communication channels, such as anonymous police call lines, cannot be overlooked—given the reluctance of some citizens to share their identities. Citizens surveyed (71 percent) say they are more likely to communicate with police if they have the option to remain anonymous, especially when reporting crimes and disturbances.

These findings are a result of Accenture’s June 2012 survey of nearly 1,300 citizens across Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.
Bridging The Communication Chasm

Digital tools should play an important role in communicating with citizens who want to support police to fight crime, but do not feel adequately informed of police activities. Citizens believe that digital channels can assist in these ways:

- 72 percent of respondents believe social media can aid in investigating crimes and prosecuting offenders.
- 53 percent of respondents believe that social media usage by police can improve overall police services.
- 47 percent of respondents believe social media can be used to prevent crime.

In addition to satisfying citizens' thirst for information, digital channels offer other benefits for police forces, including:

**Lower Cost.** Amid today’s funding pressures, digital offers a low-cost channel for communications.

**Efficient.** By leveraging digital tools, police forces may free up more officers to be visible on the streets fighting crime.

**Speed to Citizen.** The majority of respondents to the survey said that time-sensitive information is the type of information police should be sharing most. Digital tools offer an efficient way to disseminate bulletins, alerts and information in the wake of public safety events.

**Instill Confidence.** Citizens may feel more secure interacting with police when the police have an ubiquitous presence. Digital channels offer a way for police to keep an open dialogue and share information abundantly so that citizens feel connected and informed. This enhanced confidence may help assuage citizens’ concerns about anonymity.

**Modern Medium.** Digital tools are a way to reach the tech-savvy younger generation that may ignore traditional media channels, such as television or newspaper, and want information delivered and shared across mobile platforms.

**Making Connections.** Digital tools enable police to communicate with often difficult to reach groups, such as anarchists or underground groups. Police might also virtually link citizens—even criminals—with support groups so that they feel part of a larger community, and also feel safer about coming forward with information. For example, connecting a former gang member with a community group that helps youth rise above a life of crime.

Social Media in Action

The Vancouver Police Department enlisted the help of the public via social media to help identify people involved in a riot at a National Hockey League Final in 2011. The play-offs were the first time the department used social media during a large event and they received an overwhelmingly positive response. Twitter followers increased from 8,712 to 10,246 to more than 16,000 in the days following the riots.
Digital Channels Preferred by Citizens

Accenture’s Online Citizen Survey Reveals Communication Preferences

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- **81%**
  Facebook

- **50%**
  Websites and Portals

- **35%**
  Twitter

- **23%**
  Smartphone Apps
Citizens have made it clear that they want to support police in fighting and preventing crime, but that they need more information from police to do so. So what can police do to engage better with citizens and close the communication gap?

By adopting new digital technologies, police can create new communication channels to engage citizens and gather leads to support their investigations. Accenture policing specialists suggest a focus on four primary areas:

**IMPROVE INFORMATION/DATA MANAGEMENT** – Accenture’s research and experience suggests that more than 75 percent of the processes required to track and respond to crimes are essentially the same around the world. Thus, there is a set of processes and capabilities common to all police forces—and these are underpinned by effective information management. An enterprise-wide view of information, which includes data integrated from partner agencies, not only prevents isolated islands of information, but also better equips law enforcement personnel to fight today’s sophisticated crime, rather than fighting the system.

**ANALYTICS** – By managing and analyzing the digital information they receive from citizens, police forces can create valuable intelligence to prevent and solve crimes faster, support investigations and secure prosecutions. They can also reduce costs at a time of budget reductions. The key is to pull unstructured data and look for trends and patterns within that information. By harnessing the power of this data, a police organization’s investment in analytics can more than pay for itself.

**MOBILE TOOLS** – Mobile tools enable police officers to do their jobs with the right information, at the right place, at the right time. Such freedom liberates officers to access vital information in the field. Police officers can make decisions faster, and in real-time. The Guardia Civil in Spain, for example, has deployed 3,000 mobile units to allow officers to remotely access vital information anytime, and from any place.

**CITIZEN PORTALS** – According to the Accenture research, the majority of citizens surveyed said they were likely to use a website or portal. Such citizen portals can provide a means for two-way communication between citizens and police, reducing cost, improving citizen engagement and public safety. Portals can also offer a layer of protection, for example key codes or pin numbers, so that citizen anonymity is protected. These unique identifiers offer citizens a means to share tips or access rewards without having to divulge personal information.

For more information about Accenture’s online citizen survey, or to learn more about technology-led transformation in policing, please contact:

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About the survey

The online citizen survey included 1,298 respondents across six countries, with 200 respondents each from Canada, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, the United States and the United Kingdom. 30 percent of respondents live in urban areas, 26 percent reside in suburban areas and 45 percent live in rural areas or small towns. 29 percent of those completing the online survey were between 18 years and 39 years of age when the survey was conducted by Market Connections in June 2012.

Learn more about Accenture’s work with law enforcement agencies and the Accenture Police Centre of Excellence.
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Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, with more than 249,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. Combining unparalleled experience, comprehensive capabilities across all industries and business functions, and extensive research on the world’s most successful companies, Accenture collaborates with clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments. The company generated net revenues of US$25.5 billion for the fiscal year ended Aug. 31, 2011. Its home page is www.accenture.com.