

New High-Tech iSeries Web-Based Police Management System Extends The Law's Reach

Recently a man entered the Allegany County Detention Center in Cumberland, Maryland, to visit a friend who was incarcerated there. When a guard keyed the visitor's name into a newly installed iSeries based police reporting system, he realized that the visitor was wanted on an outstanding arrest warrant. If not for this browser-based crime-fighting tool, he might have left freely following his visit, since it would have taken several phone calls for guards to unearth any connection to wrongdoing. As it happened, he left in handcuffs.

Wanted criminals don't normally enter buildings through doors that automatically lock behind them. Most often, it takes solid police work and good information to catch them. Up to date information is a key weapon in the war on crime, say police officials. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security apparently agrees: It offers financial incentives to agencies that acquire information management systems that integrate into a larger network.



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One new tool that gives police officers instant access to information is the MCCI Police Reporting System from Mason Computer Consulting, Inc. (www.masoncci.com) in Hagerstown, Maryland. The MCCI Police Reporting System is a multifaceted incident reporting system with a database and executables that reside on an IBM iSeries box.

Authorized users can access this system from any PC based web browser. Common, inexpensive, wireless technology and laptop computers make this system accessible to police officers on patrol. The MCCI Police Reporting System is also designed to be uncomplicated for end users, and easily maintained.

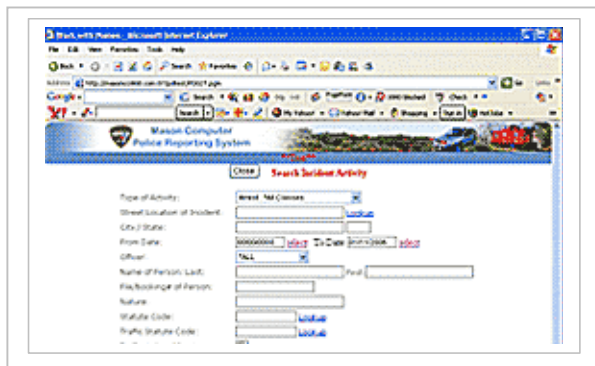
Former IBM system engineer Chuck Mason is the president of MCCI. Founded in 1995, MCCI initially sold IBM Midrange hardware. Now it turns out high quality custom RPG and web-based applications for 50-plus customers in Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Virginia. The majority of MCCI's customers are small and medium sized businesses.

Mason is a fervent believer in truth, justice, and technologies that make life easier. In 1997 he discovered an RPG application development tool called ProGen Plus from Business Computer Design Int'l (BCD) www.bcdsoftware.com. ProGen helped Mason and three of his programmers keep pace with demand for a large number of iSeries applications that his clients wanted. "When I first started my business, lots of customers wanted work done but couldn't afford to pay for the time. With ProGen we are able to develop applications in a fraction of the time, and customers can afford the things they need," says Mason. In one early instance, he quoted a client \$100,000 for an extensive new system, but the fee was mistakenly based on the amount of time it would have taken him to write it manually in RPG. "When we finished, it actually came in at \$30,000 because of the amount of time I saved using ProGen." Since his development fees were so reasonable, customers continued to add on new projects to the list. "ProGen helped me build my consulting business," he says.

Two years ago, many of Mason's customers began asking for browser-based systems and again he looked around for a good development environment. He investigated WebSphere initially, but it required hardware upgrades, training, lots of development time, and in the end, the applications ran very slowly. He also considered manual Java development. Then his past led him forward: "From working with ProGen I knew BCD was stable. I knew where they were coming from and where they were going. We were very happy with ProGen so I tried WebSmart. Soon I had WebSmart running on a very small iSeries," says Mason, adding, "I took existing green screen maintenance programs and had them converted in ten to fifteen minutes. It was simple."

A time and attendance system and a couple shopping cart apps were the first systems Mason developed after a couple days of WebSmart training. "If you are able to follow a visual basic program you can create your logical flow," he says, adding, "WebSmart will allow you to generate the code using standard chains and reads. You can also use a template that generates everything in SQL, so if you have an SQL background you can use this template to generate your reads, writes, and lists."

Recently, the police department for the City of Cumberland hired MCCI to write a web accessible police reporting system that would run on an iSeries machine that served the municipality. "In the middle of developing the system for Cumberland, a couple of other police agencies approached me about sharing information across the board," Mason says.



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Figure 1: Search Incident Activity

He went on to design a system using WebSmart that runs on the iSeries APACHE web server. It allows multiple agencies to be online at the same time and share information. "If you are searching for warrants you have the ability to see warrants from all the agencies on this system. For police reporting systems this is a first," he says.

This system tracks incidents, names, property, and narratives, and uses SQL calls from a WebSmart application template to facilitate all searches. It lets multiple agencies share the same major database through controlled and secured access. Now dubbed the MCCI Police Reporting System, it allows for the attachment and storage of any PC file to an incident including digital video, audio, pictures, Microsoft Word and Excel documents, and others.

The Master Name database stores the names of complainants, witnesses, victims, suspects, arrests, traffic accidents, etc. The system allows for the storage of multiple mug shots per name. Included is the interface to a mug shot camera. The system also interfaces with Microsoft Word documents.

The MCCI Police Reporting System is inexpensive for police agencies to maintain and can be serviced by those who use it. All drop downs are maintained through WebSmart maintenance programs. "If an agency wants to add another type of activity, they can simply add it to the system. If they want to add an officer's rank or some other parameter they can add that also," says Mason.

The system is buttoned down with secure SSL and encryption. Access is granted to those with a User ID and Password. Once logged on, the system knows what agency the user is assigned to and his security clearance level. Access can be limited to view only, view and update, and multi- agency access.

BCD

Working with WebSmart

To develop the new police reporting system Mason first found a SQL template in WebSmart that did a substantial amount of what he wanted his program to do. A developer that was familiar with HTML helped him tweak it to match his data presentation requirements. Then, Mason used PML, WebSmart's advanced programming language to add additional functionality. "We got very deep into PML," says Mason. "A while back I took Visual Basic and Java classes and I was very skeptical about getting into another new language. I found that I caught on to PML very quickly and in three days I was very productive. The BCD website is also very helpful. It helped me with the Microsoft Word interface. And their tech support guys are very skilled-- I would come across some specific and unique requirements and they would let me know how to handle it."

In some cases, past transgressions should not be forgotten so Mason then set out to populate the system with as much historical information as possible and converted data from several agencies going back as far as seven years. "All of those agencies had their separate systems. I had to write a conversion program for the legacy data from all of those separate PC based systems," he says.

The MCCI Police Reporting System went live in Cumberland in July. Since then, Mason has added four additional agencies to this site and all of them are sharing information. It is currently serving around 160 police officers. "Another three agencies are scheduled to come onto that site soon, and we are also working with Chambersburg, Pennsylvania." Mason sees no visible upper limits. "I can put this system on their biggest iSeries box in production and serve a thousand plus officers."

The Verdict

By facilitating instant access to data, the MCCI Police Reporting System has put one more tool in the hands of police officers to help catch criminals. It has also made their jobs easier in many ways. In the past, an officer would have to type several paragraphs of text into a criminal complaint. "We have set it up so he can click on a button, and look for the statute code that he is charging the person with, and paste the five or six paragraphs that it produces right into the complaint," says Mason. The State's Attorney's office has gotten a boost too. Not long ago, all of the police reports they requested came on paper and it took days to get them. Now they have instant access and can review all of these documents online.



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