

Arizona's Glendale Police Department Uses Redact-It® to Speed Response to Public Records Requests

Vertical Industry

- Law Enforcement

Functional Areas

- Criminal Investigations Division
- Public Information Office
- Records Division

Organization Facts

- Over 600 employees, including more than 450 police officers
- Dedicated to serve and protect a community of approximately 250,000 citizens

Challenge

- Reduce time spent on redacting police reports
- Deploy secure and efficient redaction software

Redact-It Solution

- Easy-to-use redaction scripts
- Easy "Find & Redact" tool for known terms
- "Redact Text" tool enables quick, on-the-fly redactions
- Reduces department's redaction tasks by several hours

Every state in the U.S. has its own version of a Public Records Act which requires that non-confidential records maintained by state, county and city governments be made available to the public. For the Glendale Police Department (Glendale PD), the Arizona Public Records Law provides general guidance in how it responds to public requests for police reports.

In 2010, the Glendale PD generated more than 42,000 Offense and Traffic reports. Glendale Police Sgt. Daniel Soto explained that following a request for one of these reports, the department must first determine if the report is suitable for distribution. "The main reason for not releasing a report is for an ongoing investigation because it could jeopardize that investigation. Other than that, we are required to release a redacted copy to the public upon request."

Privacy Material, Confidential Information and HIPAA Compliance

When responding to requests, the Glendale PD must first redact a police report before releasing it to the public. "We keep personal information from going out, such as Social Security numbers, dates of birth, phone numbers and credit card numbers," said Soto. They must also redact medical information and any specific descriptions of bodily injury in accordance with HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) Privacy rules and any crime details considered to be too explicit or graphic for the general public.

With police reports containing so much privacy material and confidential information, the ability to quickly and accurately turn around public requests is a daunting task. As explained by Soto, "A typical homicide report could be two, three, four hundred pages long. That's going to take some time to get through."

The Need for Quick, Secure, Electronic Redaction

The sergeant explained how they used to redact reports, "We were using Word to block out text. We would highlight the word, give it a black background to match the font—essentially make it just look like it was gone. It was taking forever. With our sergeants spending a significant amount of time redacting reports we wanted to find ways to automate that, make it easier."

In addition to saving time, the Glendale PD wanted to deploy redaction software that truly redacted content and metadata—not just a highlight that could easily be reversed to reveal text.

"We started looking around, did some research and decided to go with Redact-It®," said Soto.

Redact-It Used for Police Reports

To redact police reports, Soto and his fellow sergeants now use Redact-It by Informative Graphics Corporation. Redact-It is an easy-to-use, electronic tool which safely removes privacy information and sensitive content from virtually any document type, including PDF, TIFF and Microsoft Word and Excel.

Continued

(Cont.)

Redact-It makes it easy to redact all instances of a name, Social Security number, birth date, phone number, account number and more. Redactions can be applied simply by dragging a box, searching for text strings or patterns, using predefined block out zones or applying reusable scripts. Redact-It creates fully sanitized TIFF or PDF renditions of the original document for easy distribution. Redacted content is actually removed in the output file, not just covered.

User Feedback Leads to Enhancements

Soto explained their initial user experience with Redact-It included running a script using known terms and then going back to read the entire report, doing redactions on the fly. If they did find additional text to redact, they would click on the “Find & Redact” tool, type in the text, and then redact it. Suspecting there might be a way to do this with less clicks, they approached IGC.

The IGC team was “really interested in hearing our questions and concerns,” said the sergeant. “They gave us a 2-hour training session here at the station. And we sent our homicide sergeant down to their office. He went through everything in Redact-It that he thought would be a benefit to us.”

Based on the police department’s feedback, IGC created a new “Redact Text” tool to the Redact-It software. Ideal for a “read and redact” process, it allows a user to select a word, name or phrase to redact and instantly redact all instances throughout the entire report. Soto said the new tool “shortcuts a few steps for us and makes it quicker.”

The sergeant commented on IGC’s responsiveness to their needs. “The customer service we received was great. I don’t think we’ve ever had a company do anything like that for us. I’m very impressed with IGC’s willingness to really look at and see what customer wants and needs are and try to adapt to those.”

Improving Efficiency

Speeding up the work cycle, the sergeant estimates that Redact-It has reduced redaction tasks by several hours across the Criminal Investigations Division. “Our records division, public information officer and every sergeant in our criminal investigations division—we’re all now using Redact-It. Accurately redacting reports is a very time consuming job. Efficiency is very important to our agency and Redact-It has reduced the time it takes with each report, which has increased our work production and ultimately our efficiency.”

Summary

Law enforcement officers are dedicated to protecting lives and property. When it comes to releasing public records, they are also called upon to protect privacy and confidential information—and Redact-It is there to help. “In addition to time savings, we now have security of knowing the document is truly redacted,” said Soto.