

Essex Police

Interactive technology brings efficiency and relevance to police training



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Sergeant Andy Spink, Trainer, Essex Police

Holding the attention of a training room full of police officers who would generally prefer to be out there doing the job is never an easy task, particularly when the subject can often include complex legislation.

This was one of the challenges that faced Essex Police Sergeant Andy Spink when he became a trainer, and one that the introduction of SMART Board™ interactive whiteboards has helped him to overcome. “Most police officers I’ve worked with want to be out there getting on with the job,” explains Sergeant Spink, who ‘found his niche’ as a trainer six years ago after 16 years in operations.

“Officers know the value of training, but given the choice between sitting in a training room or being out on

division, they always prefer to be getting the job done.”

Once he had qualified as a trainer he knew that one of the most difficult parts of the job was going to be grabbing the attention of those he was training, and making sure that they got the most out of the courses they were on. “You need to make training sessions relevant to the work that officers are going to be doing,” says Sergeant Spink. “But if you can relate the training room scenario to something more practical, and get officers more involved in the training, then you know they will learn more from the course. That’s one of the areas where the SMART Boards have really helped.”

Sergeant Spink also believes training sessions using a SMART Board can provide a valuable tool for future reference. “One of the most common responses of officers who have made a mistake is to say ‘It wasn’t my fault, I haven’t had the training for that.’ But with the sessions we run on the interactive whiteboard, we can save the presentation along with all the comments written on the board during the session. This gives us a timed and dated record of the training we have delivered. We know who has been present in each session, so by referring to all that information we can say to an officer, ‘Okay, you haven’t had the right training on that issue’, or alternatively, ‘Well you were here on that day and that’s the training we went through, so you should have known what to do.’

And while officers are learning valuable lessons in the training room, Sergeant Spink believes that as they

become more comfortable using the SMART Boards, trainers themselves are developing new techniques.

“Once people have understood the basics of using the SMART Boards and are comfortable with the technology – which is basically the same as using a computer – they begin to see the potential. There’s no need to spend time or money standing by the printer or the photocopier when we can send notes out to officers’ individual e-mail addresses before a session, and then an updated version once the session is over.”

While Sergeant Spink is keen to emphasise the link between the theoretical and the practical for his students, the Essex Police College (EPC) also has a very practical role to play in the county’s policing. The centre, which is based just a few hundred yards from the force’s headquarters, is also the designated Gold Command Control Centre for the county’s most serious incidents.

As part of such an operation, the smaller training rooms would host a range of agencies which may be involved in a major incident – such as the fire service, ambulance and the local authority – while the main lecture theatre would become the conference room, with a separate annex for the Gold Command team.

All the rooms are equipped with SMART Boards and EPC technician Dave Gibbs can envisage the increased operational benefits that could soon be available to the force, thanks to the planned introduction of SMART Bridgit™ conferencing software.



“At the moment communications control and the Silver Command Control Centre are based in the force information room at headquarters, while Gold Command would be based here,” explains Dave. “But we also have facilities through the SMART Boards for video conferencing and exchanging information between ourselves and other strategically important sites such as Stansted Airport. We are still working on ensuring that all our existing software is compatible with the Bridgit software, so we’ve yet to run a full simulation with all three sites linked up. But the main lecture theatre was used as the Gold Command briefing room during the terrorist attacks in London on July 7, and the set up worked very well.”

“People are really starting to understand the advantages of using SMART Boards and the amount they are used will continue to increase as people move away from flip charts and wipe boards, and become converts to

the new technology.” Sergeant Spink believes the boards are already helping to make a difference to operational policing in Essex. “If we can use the technology to make training sessions more relevant and increase the interaction with students, it can only help to ensure that when those officers are back out on the street, the lessons they have learned in the training room stay with them.”