

NetMotion Mobility® Has Deputies' Back Through Confidence in Connectivity

To protect the public as well as themselves, responders rely on mobile connectivity for the critical information they need. The Sheriff's Office in Coweta County, Georgia, was struggling with a mobile VPN that triggered connectivity issues and cut off front-line personnel from receiving vital alerts. Leaving them extremely vulnerable. Replacing it with the NetMotion Mobility Mobile Performance Management solution solved virtually all of their problems.

High-Stakes Connection Problems

The Coweta Sheriff's Office was a long-time user of a VPN that, for the most part, had done the job of providing a secure tunnel. Then, a major upgrade and a series of minor ones unleashed a torrent of problems. "The new version didn't integrate with our systems very well," recalls Josh Chambers, Systems Analyst for the department. "It started with minor problems that ended up being major headaches. Monday mornings, it was very common to have from three to five deputies lined up at my door because they couldn't connect." The fix? "I had to stop the VPN service, clean out some temp files, restart the service, then go to the server and re-initialize the client," he recounts. "It was a nightmare. I was living in the vehicles in the parking lot, which was like a drive through for getting our deputies back up and running."

There were numerous phone calls to vendor support, patches offered, and suggested changes to the firewall. Chambers dutifully made the changes requested, but within a few days, the same problems would reappear.

Then came yet another problem — and the deal-breaker. The VPN's "traffic light" indicator in the system tray was supposed to show green when connected, yellow for connectivity issues, and red for not connected at all. "What we found is that the interface would show green when it shouldn't," states Chambers. "Our people would say, 'I don't get it, it's green, but we're not getting anything from CAD, we're not getting alert messages.'" The VPN was freezing, also leaving the status indicator frozen in the connected state. Here is how Chambers explained the problem to the sheriff: "You're going to have a deputy pull up behind a car on what he thinks is a routine traffic stop. He's going to look at his computer, think he's



INDUSTRY:
Public Safety

OBJECTIVES:

- Replace former VPN solution to restore critical and reliable connectivity

SOLUTIONS:

- NetMotion Mobility Mobile Performance Management Software
- Fujitsu Lifebooks
- Sierra Wireless modems
- Verizon Wireless 4G LTE network

RESULTS:

- Reliable delivery of critical information
- Greater safety for responders
- Comprehensive management of connections
- Faster troubleshooting of hardware problems

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Josh Chambers | Systems Analyst

connected, think he’s good to go. He’s not going to see there’s an alert on this vehicle and that the person inside is armed and dangerous. He walks up to the window of the car. This is a big problem. This has to get solved.”

Comprehensive Connection Management

Given the severity of problem, the sheriff gave the go-ahead to do an immediate evaluation of NetMotion Mobility Mobile Performance Management software. “All the problems that we had with the old VPN, oh my God, they all went away,” exclaims Chambers. “What a wonderful feeling.”

He saw some of the differences that NetMotion Mobility could make right from the start. For instance, “To get the old VPN installed, the laptops had to be connected directly to our internal wireless network. Not a third-party hotspot, or connection through the modem in the car. So I had to either get the car close enough to a county hotspot, or bring the laptop here so I could do it in my office, uninstall the product, reinstall it, and then put the laptop back in the car.” With NetMotion? “I could do the install from a thumb drive, in the car, in a minute-and-a-half.”

Onboarding new deputies was also much easier. As Chambers recounts, with the old VPN, “When a new deputy logged into a vehicle, he would often see ‘No logon servers available.’ That meant the service had stopped. With NetMotion Mobility, a brand-new user types in their credentials, Active Directory verifies, than Mobility runs their credentials up the chain. We have yet to see the ‘No logon servers’ message. It’s a beautiful thing.”

More than a VPN, Mobility Mobile Performance Management comprises a complete solution for managing mobile connectivity. One example is the mobile analytics capability. “We look that every once in a while when a unit is having problems,” declares Chambers. “I can track the launch counts, usage detail, battery status, terminations, network errors. The few occasions we’ve had to look at it, we could either chalk it up to a problem with an area of coverage, or the modem seizing. We restart the modem, and the connection comes right back up.”

Applying Flexible Policy Controls

As Chambers found out, fine-tuning how applications access connections, through NetMotion policies, was a major advantage. “We had some problems setting up the AVL and the license plate readers, but as soon as we set passthroughs for those, they all came right up with no problem,” explains Chambers. Policies are also poised to assist the county as they move from DVD-based to over-the-air dashcam systems. There the policies will allow them to optimize the connections to make more efficient use of bandwidth, and set parameters so the video streams receive the proper priority without overwhelming the most-essential traffic.

The Root of the Problem — Solved

“In Coweta County, coverage is pretty good. The problem wasn’t Verizon,” declares Chambers. “It wasn’t our Sierra modems. It wasn’t our Fujitsu Lifebooks. It was our previous VPN provider.”

“NetMotion has definitely made my job a lot easier,” he summarizes. “Now when a deputy shows up at the office, it’s not connectivity issues, it’s something in the hardware. The connectivity is extremely stable for us. We’ve taken connectivity problems out of the equation, 100%. It’s not the VPN anymore.” Which makes a critical difference. As he says, “I can’t have the laptops unconnected, unable to alert our deputies, and the deputies unaware of that. In today’s society, that’s a *bad* thing.”