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Press Release

SPEECH RECOGNITION DEPLOYED FOR AIRWAVE

New technologies are leveraging powerful operational benefits from the Government's £3bn investment in Airwave as the current West Midlands trial of the Speech Recognition based Police Voice Portal demonstrates.

Developed by Cobalt Telephone Technologies in conjunction with Civica, the new Police Voice Portal (PVP) trialed by West Midlands police liberates patrolling officers by giving them speedy, direct, spoken access to the secure information held on the Police National Computer (PNC). They simply have to ask for the vehicle information they need.

In specific terms, operational advantages are created by:

- removing the need to draw on the resource of specialised controllers for routine VI (vehicle enquiry) checks;
- allowing "head-up" enquiries to be made without the officer running the risk of becoming distracted by the need to input to fiddly keyboard or stylus driven devices; and
- ensuring that the key information is presented in priority order.

All this is achieved using an interface that requires next-to-no training.

The net effect is not only to help increase the effectiveness of patrolling officers but also reduce the pressure on their support colleagues. “Our live trials, although still ongoing, have been very promising,” says Max Corney, Communications Manager for West Midlands Police. “We have concentrated on giving the new speech recognition technology some harsh, but realistic operational tests. Having started the project with both scepticism and hope, we are now increasingly convinced that we are pioneering a solution that will develop into a nationally deployed resource.”

How it works:

- Police Officers use their normal personal issue airwave handsets to make a connection to the PVP.
- The portal recognises the identity of the officer and using GPS pinpoints their geographical position.
- The officer simply speaks in the registration number of the vehicle that he or she wishes to check together with a reason code.
- The enquiry is checked against the PNC.
- A prioritised summary of the important details are returned to the caller in the form of a spoken message.
- Optionally, in addition, an SDS message (an Airwave text message similar to SMS) is sent to the officer’s handset.
- A transfer facility can connect the officer to their local Operational Control Unit (OCU) if necessary.
- A full audit trail is written to the PNC.

What’s in it for West Midlands police?

- Better utilisation of OCU resources.
- Next to no training required – it is designed to be intuitive.
- Encourages proactive – instinct based local policing.
- Use of GPS location tracking means that PNC audit trails are accurate and complete.

What's in it for the officer on the beat?

- Easy to use for officers of every generation.
- Every enquiry is dealt with quickly and responsively regardless of major incidents that may be tying down other central resources.
- The “heads-up” nature of the spoken interface means that officers keep their eyes on the unfolding events, not on the handset.

“The impact made by vehicle mounted ANPR (Automated number Plate Recognition) when linked to the PNC is now recognised by all,” says Max Corney. “We see that the innovation we are piloting is entirely complementary and anticipate that it will have similar national effects.”

Notes to editors:

West Midlands Police

West Midlands Police is the second largest police force in the country, covering an area of 348 sq miles and serving a population of almost 2.63 million. The region sits at the very heart of the country and covers the three major centres of Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton. It also includes the busy and thriving districts of Sandwell, Walsall, Solihull and Dudley. An average of 170,000 motorists travel through the region daily, making its motorways some of the busiest in Europe.

Against this backdrop, the force deals with more than 2,000 emergency calls for help every day, as well as patrolling the streets and responding to incidents 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week.

Airwave

Airwave is a secure digital radio network dedicated for the exclusive use of the UK's emergency and public safety services. Designed to carry voice and data communications, the service offers guaranteed levels of coverage across England, Wales and Scotland. This means that users can stay in instant communication even in remote areas or within confined spaces of buildings and tunnels where radio coverage has often failed in the past.

Routing across an encrypted network Airwave communications cannot be scanned or monitored by outsiders. The system's multi-functional handsets, supplied by Sepura in the case of West Midlands, act as a digital radio, mobile phone and data terminal in one. The speech quality on Airwave is high thanks to a combination of network and handset technologies. It is this better quality speech path that has allowed speech recognition based capabilities such as that within the PVP to be contemplated.

UK Police are one of the primary users of O2 Airwave and the service is being provided to all police forces throughout England, Scotland and Wales as part of a £2.9bn UK Government contract. The O2 Airwave rollout will be complete by mid 2005.

Cobalt Telephone Technologies

Cobalt Telephone Technologies is a specialist in the provision of automated transaction solutions. Cobalt's channels to market are often through partnerships as well as in its own right. Dominant in several niche sectors, Cobalt provides transaction processing solutions for household names as Tesco, Thomas Cook, My Travel, NCP and Manchester United as well as a broad range of local authorities.

Civica

Civica is a major supplier of software and IT services to the Public Sector. The Civica enforcement business concentrates on bringing together many years of successful operation in both the police and local authority parking enforcement markets. Civica specialises in a wide range of software and technology solutions, including Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR), systems to access the Police National Computer (PNC) and comprehensive handheld technology. As a large IT service company Civica acts as a systems integrator for various 'Best of Breed' third party products so as to offer complete turnkey solutions to its customers.

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