

How Patrolfinder Helped My Department Eliminate A Hot Spot

Schenectady Police Department – Schenectady New York



Police Chief Eric Clifford,
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Several years ago, **Schenectady Police Chief Eric Clifford** approached area businesses about what they would like to see from their police department.

When he came to one business CEO, he turned the question back on Clifford: What would you like to see from area businesses? That CEO was **Transfinder** leader **Antonio Civitella**.

This led to ongoing conversations and eventually the launch of **Patrolfinder**, designed to assist police officers in their patrols. The aim was to help protect officers as they protect our communities. The conversations continue to this day.

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Tell us the backstory on approaching Transfinder to create what became Patrolfinder. ”

The initial conversation started when I was preparing for my interview to become chief. I had made my rounds through the business community, prominent business leaders, and I approached them to ask, “What do you as needs in our community?” Transfinder President and CEO Antonio Civitella flipped it on me and asked, “How can we help you? How can we help the police department?” I ended up circling back with him with pointed concerns and ideas. One of those concerns was, how do we increase internal communication at the police department? That’s been a pain point for the department for years. Sharing information rather than having each police officer operate in a silo with each detective have that one or two people that they go to for information and not know that there’s another 40 people that have information. How do we better share information, important information, officer safety, related information?”

“How did Patrolfinder play a leading role in eradicating a hot spot in your city?”

We’ve had hot spots that we’ve been really working on for a long time and for the most part, they haven’t changed. But there is an area where a hot spot emerged. There were multiple shots fired, multiple stabbings, multiple assaults that happened in this area. It certainly got our attention. We would have neighborhood complaints. It was an intersection that had a corner store and the more we looked into it, we were realized that the corner store was the nucleus of this problem, it was the reason why this neighborhood was going through what was going through, drug dealing, litter, a lot of quality-of-life issues, loud music calls coming from cars.

One of the first things that we did was we designated it as a hot spot in Patrolfinder, and we recycled the notifications to officers to drive to that area more frequently. Rather than trying to hit each street every four days or every three days, we tried to have officers go through that area every six hours. We weren't able to hit it all the time, but we certainly increased our presence in that area.

Simultaneously, through investigative efforts, we brought in other departments within the city. We were able to visit that location, that store, identify some areas where they were not in compliance with city codes, and we were able to declare that store as a nuisance and we were able to shut it down. With that store being closed, in addition to our increased patrols in that area, this basically is no longer a hot spot. When that crime went down we didn't just eliminate it as a hot spot. We kept it there for another six months, and it didn't come back so we just recently removed it as being a hot spot.

Does that provide a template for how to deal with other hot spots?

It was our first one. It certainly is our template and we're going try to replicate it in other areas and continuously test other methods. The one thing that we feel that we can replicate everywhere is the increased patrols. Not every store is a problem and it's not just stores. Sometimes it's just a house that has activity going on in it. Sometimes we have to take different approaches. But the one consistent approach we can have is increased patrols. As a direct reaction to those increased calls for service, increased crimes, increased criminal activity we were able to justify those increased patrols.

When you approached Transfinder, there was a need to improve efficiency within the department, correct?

I studied economics at Union College and one of my focuses was on efficiency of operations. I just started thinking, how do we become more efficient in what we're doing at the patrol level. Thinking back of my days where when I would start my shift, I'd do a certain pattern and next thing you know, I'm answering calls for service. Sometimes I wondered, I never got to that part of my zone because of that call. How do we better communicate to my colleagues that come in after me where I've been that day to have better coverage within our assigned zones.

How does Patrolfinder improve delivering information at shift handoff?

Back then, you had to hope that you came through the door at the same time that the person taking over for your zone was leaving or was still on the station. If you got stuck on a late call, um, you didn't see them. And, you know, unless you went above and beyond this in a text message or made a phone call, you just weren't able to pass off information to them. There's also a way that you could hand off that information, which is to use our computer-aided dispatch and create a bulletin that's then read off at lineup by the sergeant. But that's really for important things. You wouldn't want to put something on there unless it was really significant.

What Patrolfinder does is you're able to put those things on there and then you're actually able to put other things on there that might not have met those criteria. You can put them on there now because it's unlimited and let the officers decide what's important. The more information, the better. There is a fine line between having too much information and those are some things that we've been discussing about having supervisors approved bulletins rather than just having anybody put them on there.

We want to make sure that what shows up is important and actionable and officer safety-related.

Explain how using Patrolfinder closes the loop and aligns with the Koper Curve policing strategy of increasing patrols to drive down hot spots.

It's getting police officers in the areas that have the highest needs more often. Just their mere presence with the foundation of the Koper Curve is providing an extended period of safety in those areas. That's what

Patrolfinder is providing. What we've built off of it is the idea that as patrol officers are efficiently patrolling their zones, they are provided with location-based information that could be important to them, whether it's officer safety-related, situational awareness-related, a combination of both. Letting officers know, hey, there might be a weapon in this house. Letting officers know there was a domestic violence incident that happened here last shift or yesterday. So, it's information that officers always have had at their disposal, but it just makes it a lot easier for them to see it should they choose to layer it on this map and it comes up as they drive through the neighborhoods that their patrolling.

It's like Waze in reverse? Instead of speeders being on the lookout for speed traps, police can be on the lookout for potential trouble spots.

The idea about this came from using Waze, where, as you're driving down an interstate, you'll see a disabled vehicle ahead or pothole ahead or the police are ahead, that kind of notification system. Now we've transitioned that to policing where, as you're patrolling your neighborhood, something might come up that should be of importance to you.

And police can customize what they see on the screen as their patrolling?

Officers all do their job differently. So they have the ability to choose what they want to see. If it's a busy night, you probably don't see everything. If it's a slow night, maybe you want to see everything that can be shown to you. Or if you're working a specific detail, perhaps you want you want to pull up where the active warrants are or where the sex offenders live, things like that. Patrolfinder gives you the ability to place on the map location-based information for whatever task you're assigned.

What is different about patrolling today by having information handy vs. the pre-Patrolfinder days?

Some of this information they just wouldn't know altogether. They wouldn't know unless they were sent there. So you'd actually have to be dispatched to a location and then pull up the premise history to see what incidents were there. It might take multiple clicks to get there. Whereas, if you're driving down the road and your destination is a certain location, you might see on Patrolfinder that three houses away the police were there the night before. Then you could inquire into what that was, see if it's related to what you're there for. Maybe it was a burglary two nights before and now you're going to a burglary and you could start tying those two things together. It's always been something that a good police officer could just do on their own by inputting different addresses. But this basically helps them become more efficient with a lot of the things that they're doing and is more geared toward the officer safety part, especially when it comes to the things that they need to know. That's where the situational awareness component of this comes into play. Ideally, as officers, we want to communicate things that are important to our colleagues and creating attentions points.

Why is this so important?

The more intelligence you have about a situation or area, the better. It gives officers the ability to know more about their zone. If this is the zone that you like to operate in, you want to know the most there is to know about it. Say you come back for some days off, you could jump on there and just layer on the CAD data to see what calls occurred in your zone while you were gone, and primarily the most violent ones that are on there. We're putting the relevant calls on the ones that actually need to be seen, the felony level calls or the ones that tend to be the hot topics of the day. If you want to layer on, for example, loud music complaints because that's a problem in your neighborhood that you're trying to resolve, then you could simply create that and have it done.

Describe how Patrolfinder helps officers be proactive as well.

You could have Patrolfinder show that there's a bunch of loud music calls on a night that is busy and that you couldn't get to. Then, the next day, when it's slow, you can pull those up and be able to follow up on them. If

you're doing your job right you don't necessarily need to make an arrest on all these, but you could show up at the door and say, 'I see there was a lot of music complaint here' last night. This is why it's not acceptable. These are the ramifications should it happen again.' You can still follow up on this, be efficient in handling calls, be proactive, trying to stop them before they are repeat offenders.

Does Patrolfinder help officers act as their own dispatcher to a certain extent?

One of the original ideas for building this out was to send the lower priority calls – we call them Priority 3s – to Patrolfinder as a call-in-waiting and as the officer drove through their zone, they would see that there's a call-in-waiting and they should stop at it. From a geocoded perspective, as soon as they hit a certain perimeter, we would say, 'Go to this location, handle this call,' whether it's a report for a broken flowerpot or something that could just be done in person. That's one of the ideas that we have is to eliminate Priority 3 calls so dispatchers only dispatch Priority 1s and Priority 2s. Those are the more important calls that they need to be dispatched for. Everything else can be handled by the officer where they manage their own workday.

What other benefits does Patrolfinder provide?

One of the things I like about what's been built here is that it will allow us to analyze criminal patterns that are occurring and then relate our patrol patterns to them to see if there is a gap. Is there something that we're missing in our patrol patterns where crime is occurring? Something that we're thinking about is collecting data over an extended period of time and then being able to go back and look at that data along with crime data and see what an analyst can do with that.

How does Patrolfinder work with other technology your department uses?

We have an integration with our CAD where those calls are sent to Patrolfinder for officers to see and they are able to add notes to those calls. If pulled in Patrolfinder, they can add notes to the CAD and it back feeds to that so there's a historical record of that. We are looking at almost all areas of technology (such as drone technology) to see where that can that technology help us with what we're doing with Patrolfinder.

What advice would you give an organization that is just hearing about Patrolfinder or considering it for their department?

I would say no two police departments are the same. The community will tell their law enforcement department how they want to be policed and the police administrators in each department will see what's happening in their community and create strategies on how to address it. One of the things that I like about what's been built is it's very customizable for that agency to make it fit into what they need. What works for me isn't necessarily what's going to work for a town next to me or even the city that's bigger than me to the east of me. So, everybody's going to have their different priorities, everybody's going to look at it and see the capabilities and then design it to meet their needs. That's what I like most about it, if you give the product a chance and you actually use it, there's no doubt in my mind that you're going to see a benefit to it.



>> To learn more, go to [Patrolfinder.com](https://www.patrolfinder.com) or call 800-373-3609.