

LexisNexis® Case Study

Smith County, Texas Constable's Office

Rubber Check Rodeo: Tracking Down Authors of Bad Checks

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Case Study

Rubber Check Rodeo: Tracking Down Authors of Bad Checks in Texas

Overview

Located in its northeast region, Smith County is the 25th most populous county in Texas. In addition to Sheriff and local police departments, the county is policed by five constables and their subordinates. The constables are divided into five precincts and are responsible for preserving the peace through the prevention of crime and the arrest of offenders. In June 2006, John Smith was appointed as constable serving the fourth precinct. Upon taking office, he encountered a challenging workload, including thousands of outstanding warrants for the arrest of writers of bad checks.

The Challenge

According to the National Retail Federation's most recent security survey, U.S. retail losses amounted to \$41.6 billion in 2006, or 1.61% of total sales. Causes range from employee theft to credit card fraud, and include losses stemming from consumers passing bad checks. These losses can be devastating, especially to smaller vendors, and lead to higher prices and increased law enforcement workloads and costs.

In Smith County's fourth precinct, the problem with bad checks was especially acute. The eastern part of Texas, where Smith County is located, is home to a large number of universities and junior colleges which attract students from all over the country. The presence of these universities contributes to a highly transient population, with thousands of individuals moving in and out every year. As a result, tracking down the authors of bad checks can be an almost impossible challenge.

As he settled into his new position, Constable Smith began thinking about new ways to solve the precinct's bad check problem. Initially, the situation seemed intractable.

"When I took office there were boxes of bad checks dating as far back as the early eighties," said Constable Smith. "Tracking down each individual, while important, would require more man hours than we could provide and would have diverted our office away from fulfilling the full range of our responsibilities."

After spending several months trying to come up with a solution, Constable Smith came across the answer at a state-mandated continuing education course for county constables. The instructor was outlining technical solutions designed to support the needs of law enforcement.

One product, *Accurint® for Law Enforcement* from LexisNexis® Advanced Government Solutions, stood out.

Industry

Law Enforcement

Organization Profile

Smith County is the 25th most populous county in Texas and is policed by five constables and their subordinates, divided into five precincts. Tracking down the authors of the bad checks was a particularly acute problem due to the transient demographic nature of Smith County's population, home to several universities and junior colleges with people moving in and out of the area from all over the country.

Situation

The office of the Constable of Smith County, Texas had thousands of outstanding warrants for writers of bad checks dating back decades when newly appointed Constable John Smith took office in the fourth precinct. He began looking for a solution to tracking down the offenders without spending the tremendous labor and resources it would take to research each case manually.

Solution

Smith chose *Accurint® for Law Enforcement* to help track down individuals involved in these cases, some dating back to the early eighties. With the power of *Accurint®* and its ease of use, the Constable had found a solution that made recovery of the check revenue efficient and speedy, and without occupying an inordinate amount of limited manpower resources.

Results

Since employing *Accurint* in October 2007, Constable Smith has been able to recover over \$140,000 in revenue, averaging about \$8,000 a week. Area retailers were able to recoup lost revenue and Constable Smith was able to contribute significantly to the county coffers through collection of fines associated with the bad checks.

Solution

Accurint for Law Enforcement is a cutting-edge investigative technology designed by a team of former investigative professionals, including a former Director of the U.S. Secret Service, former Special Agents with the Federal Bureau of Investigations as well as officers from various municipal police departments. The solution is a Web-based tool that enables law enforcement to quickly locate suspects, find missing children and solve cases more quickly by providing instant access to a comprehensive collection of public records data that would ordinarily take days to collect using conventional investigative methods. As a result, *Accurint for Law Enforcement* helps shorten investigation time, free up valuable staff, minimize costs associated with lengthy investigations and, in some cases, save lives.

After learning more about *Accurint*, Constable Smith began factoring it into his budget—receiving access in October 2007. The constable immediately put *Accurint* to work on the precinct's bad check problem.

Using *Accurint*, Constable Smith and his staff began opening up the archive of bad checks. For most cases the Constable was able to use outdated driver's license information—captured at the time the check was written—as the basis for the *Accurint* search. Ninety-five percent of the time these searches were successful in identifying and locating the check writer—even if the check had been written decades earlier and even if the author had relocated to another state.

For the remaining searches, especially those without available driver's license information, Constable Smith was able identify and locate check writers by searching under last name and first initial. Each individual *Accurint* search took mere seconds, shortening the entire process of locating an individual to minutes instead of hours or days.

Upon locating transgressors with *Accurint*, Constable Smith and his team set out to contact them. Post cards were issued to the check writers with the following message: "Please be advised that our office is currently holding a warrant for your arrest." The office was flooded with calls from the authors of the bad checks, all seeking to settle the matter – some forgetting they'd even written the checks in the first place.

"We were in contact with people from as far away as Hawaii and New Jersey," said Constable Smith. "In fact, ninety percent of the individuals we're contacting live out of state, and were probably only in Smith County to attend college many years ago. Most had forgotten all about it and were happy to settle up. Without *Accurint*, it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, for us to contact them."



“ Without *Accurint*, it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, for us to contact [the authors of the bad checks]. ”

John Smith
Constable, Smith Co., TX

Benefits

Since employing *Accurint* in October 2007, Constable Smith and the fourth precinct constable's office have been able to collect more than \$140,000 from the authors of bad checks. The precinct office is currently pulling in as much as \$8,000 on a weekly basis. As a result, the Constable has been able to provide retailers victimized by bad checks with the money they were originally entitled to, while also collecting a significant amount in fines and contributing it to the county's general fund.

In addition to these financial benefits, Constable Smith has been able to reduce the amount of staff time spent investigating bad checks. Furthermore, the solution has proved to be very easy to use, requiring no formal training or technical support.

"When we started using *Accurint* we didn't have to take a class—it's designed so that a ten-year old could use it successfully," said Constable Smith. "*Accurint* is easy to use and we've had little trouble finding any of the individuals we were looking for—it even tells us if one of the transgressors is deceased, so we can dismiss the warrant."

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To learn more about LexisNexis® Investigative Solutions, call 1-866-242-1440 or visit lexisnexis.com/government

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