

Bringing the 'Public' To Public Safety: Web-Based Crime Mapping Tools

Thanks to new technology and a growing desire for transparency in government, an increasing number of law enforcement agencies are sharing crime data with the public through online crime mapping. Some larger agencies like the LAPD and NYPD have been doing this for several years through expensive proprietary systems that do not include data from other agencies. In other places, news organizations like the *Indianapolis Star* and the *Baltimore Sun* have provided crime maps on their websites, but agencies are often uncomfortable linking up with the news media, limiting the number of jurisdictions where this approach is viable. More recently, services like **CrimeReports.com**, from **PublicEngines Inc.** and **CrimeMapping.com**, from the **Omega Group**, have found a better solution. They both operate by linking up with an agency's Computer Aided Dispatch and Records Management Systems and tagging each call with geographic location and type so it can be displayed on GoogleMaps in near real-time to users. They also both allow citizens to sign up for email alerts about crime in their area. Both systems are relatively inexpensive (CrimeReports.com is either \$99 or \$199 per agency per month and CrimeMapping.com is between \$100 and \$300/mo., depending on jurisdiction size) and easy to implement. With 500 agencies on board, CrimeReports.com is clearly the market leader compared to CrimeMapping.com's 50. Their services are very similar, but CrimeReports.com's larger base, more powerful tools and ability to add narratives to map icons nudge it ahead of its competitor. CrimeReport.com's geographic rather than agency-based navigation mean that users can see crime data seamlessly across state and jurisdictional lines from numerous agencies. The "Analytics" tool allows users to see graphs of crime broken down by type and time. And the ability to add narratives gives agencies a powerful tool to better inform the public, noting, for example the cause of string of incidents or a call's resolution. CrimeMapping.com cannot match these. CrimeMapping.com uses both GoogleMaps and Geographical Information systems technology, which could theoretically allow for more powerful tools, but at the moment the service is not as powerful as CrimeReports.com. **Action Item: CrimeReports.com offers the most comprehensive web-based crime mapping for a better price.** 2009 PSHS Trend #4