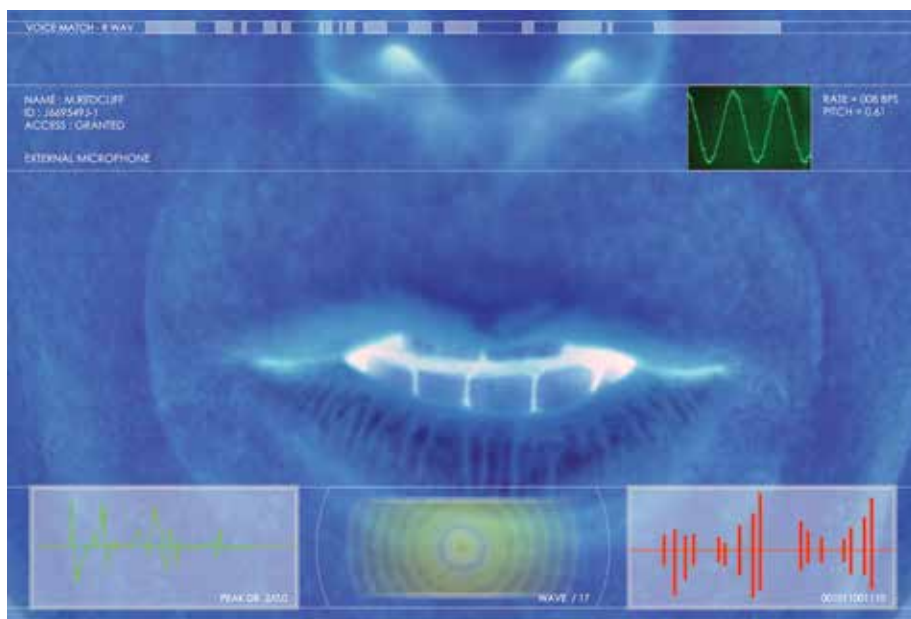BY
Ed McGuiggan, General Manager
of Dragon Professional, Nuance
Communications

Voice Recognition Technology Will Shape Policing

POLICE OFFICERS—LIKE OTHER ESSENTIAL WORKERS—ARE AMONG THE MOST SUSCEPTIBLE TO BURNOUT AND ITS ADVERSE EFFECTS. FOR DECADES, MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT OFFICER BURNOUT AND HOW TO PREVENT IT.

While the stressors inherent to one's work as an officer are obvious contributors to burnout, something subtler yet equally culpable is at play.

Administrative burdens combine with long work hours to create a vicious cycle of fatigue; repetitive stress; lack of sleep; and, ultimately, burnout. Leading police agencies have adopted a range of measures to combat fatigue and stress and to build more efficient workflows into officers' days. These measures increasingly include the use of technologies designed to lighten the burden of paperwork and help reduce overtime, such as in-car devices that enable report creation on the go.

Police professionals spend a significant portion of their workdays completing incident reports. By some estimates, officers may spend nearly half the day to create reports on the 10–12 incidents that can occur every shift. The more significant the incident, the more documentation officers may have to complete. This workload not only limits police officers' ability to focus on higher-value police work, but it also keeps their heads down in their patrol vehicles, potentially creating unsafe situations.

Still, incident reports are essential not only to other police officers and investigators, but to prosecutors, courts, and others. A lack of timely, quality reporting can have negative consequences for the administration of justice. In other words, finding ways to make report creation faster, more effective, and less cumbersome is essential.

ALLEVIATING ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS

A growing number of agencies have discovered that voice recognition technology, particularly platforms that have been purpose-built for law enforcement, can help. These tools alleviate the administrative burdens associated with paperwork and bureaucratic tasks while supporting improved report quality, accuracy, and efficiency—all while having a positive impact on officer morale and well-being.

Consider this example: In 2018, the Polk County, Florida, Sheriff's Department implemented a voice recognition solution that is integrated with their reporting software. Initially, the solution was selected for the promise of efficiency—diminishing the amount of time officers would have to spend each shift writing reports. But the agency has since gained a range of other benefits as well, including more accurate, detailed, and comprehensive reports, not to mention reduced distractions, which helps to improve officers' situational awareness. In fact, one captain in the department has called its speech recognition solution a "force

> "
> *Decreasing report writing and administrative burdens can help increase officers' satisfaction with their jobs.*
> "

multiplier," one that's been embraced widely throughout the department.

How did they achieve this?

Voice recognition enables officers to begin creating reports by using the power of their voice, dictating details directly into the reporting platform and eliminating the need for manual typing and handwriting. Rather than relying on scattered notes, emails, and voice memos to later compile a report, officers can instead assemble all of this critical information—in near real-time—in the central reporting location. Because people can speak about three times faster than they type, officers can create reports much more quickly, even when adding greater levels of detail that enhance the overall quality of the report. In addition, creating pathways for officers to make the report creation process more efficient and effective means officers spend less time tethered to a computer at the station and more time serving their communities.

Voice recognition platforms can be integrated within standard police technology systems, which means they can also facilitate the collection of mission-critical information and connect officers, dispatchers, and support staff more rapidly. Imagine how much faster teams can arrive at the scene of an emergency when unencumbered by manual tasks. By adopting an end-to-end, voice-powered solution, police agencies can realize a significant return on investment and elevate their visibility in their communities.

Voice recognition can also be harnessed to speed up data entry and everyday tasks. For example, officers can use the power of their voice within a department's computer-aided dispatch and records management systems to conduct license plate lookups. Where officers

would normally type, they can rely on the voice recognition platform to simply dictate data into fields and even to navigate between form fields.

Further, decreasing report writing and administrative burdens can help increase officers' satisfaction with their jobs, in addition to helping reduce the effects of burnout. At the end of the day, a "satisfied work force is a critical component to an organization's ability to provide service both effectively and efficiently."

INCREASING OFFICER MOBILITY

All of this has been possible for years, of course; but there's an even brighter spot on the horizon. It's the advent of 5G wireless service, which promises even faster mobile connections and greater bandwidth, meaning that it can handle more connected devices than previous generations of the network, with less latency. The availability of this service should thus significantly enhance the long-established capabilities of speech recognition technology.

The transition to cloud-based solutions offers yet another opportunity to transform the future of policing. Business organizations have been relying on cloud-based software for several years for a wide variety of reasons, from the ease of deployment and automatic software and security updates to enhanced quality control, disaster recovery, and mobility. These same benefits can be transferred to police agencies. Because cloud-based solutions such as speech recognition can be deployed without complex configurations or onsite servers, the department's IT staff can offload the required processing equipment to the cloud, thus freeing the staff to focus on more strategic priorities that support the community.

At the same time, cloud-based speech solutions and other software can often create cost savings via subscription-based pricing and little or no capital

expenditures to deploy the solution. As such, agencies can work through budget planning processes with predictable expenses accounted for.

As 5G networks become more widespread and as more police agencies move their applications to the cloud, officers will be able to access every aspect of their department's data resources on their mobile devices. That means there will be virtually no distinction between working from the patrol vehicle or the station; everyone will have access to all mission critical information so they can be productive from anywhere. Moreover, that means the value of a voice-powered platform will increase and not only because of the wireless network's ability to handle higher demands. It will also foster greater collaboration and communication among every public safety official, no matter where they are.

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF POLICING

As more police agencies embrace solutions like voice recognition technologies, they will not only uncover efficiency improvements, but also a wide range of other benefits such as enhanced report quality and accuracy, improved situational awareness, and a greater ability to focus on policing versus paperwork. And—perhaps most important—these technologies can help reduce exposure to the burdens that can contribute to burnout. In these ways, voice recognition can not only have a positive impact on officer wellness, but it can also shape the future of law enforcement. ▽