

Learning Curves and Pain Barriers and the Use of Open Sources to Fight Transatlantic Drug Crime

Good morning/afternoon ladies and gentleman, the Metropolitan Police are pleased to be represented at OSS '98 and to have the opportunity of sharing some of our experiences in the development of open sources for the support of law enforcement in London. In preparing this presentation we have sought to show you the actual look and feel of our on-line open sources and while I speak you should be seeing a collection of screen grabs from some of the applications that we have access to. We feel that this type of presentation is almost unique in that you will hopefully see the open source world from the eyes of our officers and get a first hand experience of the potential and also the limitations of the tools which they use.

Last year officers from New Scotland Yard attended this conference and as many of you would probably say they were very much the, 'new kids on the block', of open source intelligence. After nearly a year of piloting Open Sources at low level we felt that we were ready to implement an operational system. Being fairly new to some of the concepts we were interested in seeing how others had established their units and developed OS within their intelligence communities.

We also wanted to understand the pain barriers and learning curves others had gone through and learn from their mistakes and experiences. Since returning from that conference Scotland Yard now has an operational Open Source unit which serves both tactical and strategic operations in our nations capital. This new unit represents several years of research by experienced intelligence officers from within my department who have a comprehensive knowledge of the intelligence process and specialise in the development and management of new intelligence systems, practices and polices within the Metropolitan Police.

The concept of open sources began as a small seed within our Directorate back in 1994 and has been through a number of policy and developmental phases since then, including the 12 month live pilot. One officer, Steve Edwards has now moved from the developmental phase to become fully involved as the officer in charge of the Open Source Unit.

It may come as some surprise that it took us so long to grasp the nettle of open sources and it might be worthwhile taking a few minutes to go behind the scenes of the project.

Some of the challenges we have faced in trying to establish this innovative form of intelligence support are integral to many of the other challenges that we face as a large accountable public organisation.

Being big can be beautiful, providing opportunities denied to others but there can also be a price to pay, consultation can seem to take for ever and we sometimes have to pay the 'Euro Penalty' in some of our procurement exercises which can add time and expense to an already complicated process.

Developing new and innovative solutions is not as easy as it sounds. I'm sure that many of you are familiar with the scenario.... First we have to build a *business case* that goes to a *project board* who will want a *user requirement* and a *bid for funding*. When that is finally agreed we may then have to *tender in the European Journal*, examine all of the *responses and proposals*, *test and evaluate* any serious contenders and then *weigh the results* against what was in the *original user requirement*.

Another problem is that open sources do not come cheap. It is sometimes difficult to convince account holders of the cost effectiveness of obtaining a piece of information in 10 seconds for £30 against paying an informant £200 or the cost of a surveillance team at £1000 per day to get the same information. I regret that presently our budgetary and accounting procedures are yet to come to terms with such challenges and equally we have to break through a culture steeped in traditional measures.

But in spite of these minor difficulties and with the resilience and tenacity of true detectives we stand at the beginning of a long and intriguing journey into the world of open sources.

Let me begin by telling you briefly how we came to be where we are at the moment and the learning curve that we went through to get here. Those of you in law enforcement might see some similarities and be able help us with advice in the networking sessions of this conference. Others of you may be interested to know how open sources differ in our area of interest and which areas are more important in law enforcement than say, for instance, the military or commercial world.

The use of open sources in law enforcement is far from a new concept and intelligence agencies have paid outsiders for their information for many years. Some may consider informants to be open sources, after all what

is the difference between paying an academic for his or her opinion on the strategic position of illegal movements of, say, nuclear materials or paying an informant for information on top organised criminals. However, for the purposes of our own exercise we define open sources as something more specific. We consider an open source to be a root of information *outside* of the normal police arena, something that we can buy or acquire for free, which either adds value to existing intelligence or saves time and money in obtaining the information by traditional means.

Telephone intelligence is an example where most police forces have employed an established 'open source' as an origin of information and intelligence. Telephone companies provide us with data about individuals and their telephone accounts. This type of information accounts for a large amount of intelligence business requests in many law enforcement agencies.

Looking back it was probably about 5 years ago that many police forces in the UK began to realise that there was much benefit to be had from exploiting commercially available data from credit reference companies. For many years the business world had known the value of credit referencing along with demographic and consumer intelligence which is available about all of us. About that time companies who held large deposits of this data realised that the law enforcement market was an area ripe for the expansion of such business. Intelligence or information about people; where they lived, who their financial associates were, what their financial transactions were, what companies they were involved with and so on would be of significant interest in the fight against crime.

The range and sophistication of this data is something which many people would find staggering. It is now possible to build comprehensive demographic pictures of most consumers, and the data sets that go to make up that analysis are a gold mine for the investigator of the 21st century – let alone the late 20th century.

Our open source motto is 'Opening Closed Doors' and that is just what we feel we are doing. We are constantly surprised – which is something of an admission - at how many investigations can be advanced simply by telling an investigator where his suspect or target lives. Time and again we receive fragments of names and addressees from informants which are converted into real intelligence through open source and returned with value added data. Some of this may seem pretty basic but the simple fact is that until now law enforcement has not had the tools to deal with this effectively.

Until recently, open source checks for untraceable suspects and what you call 'fugitives' have accounted for 90% of the demands coming into the open source unit at Scotland Yard. Our strategy will be to make all of the fundamental open source applications available to intelligence units at all levels of our police service. This will allow the Directorate of Intelligence to focus more resources and time on the use of open sources for strategic intelligence gathering.

Another area in which we intend to make progress is in the multi-agency approach. We have already established links within our own specialist units whereby we supply intelligence on matters from fraud to paedophilia and terrorism to drug trafficking. We have also begun to forge associations with several external agencies who have a vested interest in law enforcement at national level.

We believe that by working with partners we can learn from each other's successes - and inevitably some mistakes - and at the same time build a centre of excellence for open source in the UK. We have been fortunate to benefit from the generous help and advice that is available from other members of the open source community and we are luckier than others that the name 'Scotland Yard' carries with it so much kudos. As a result we have also received a lot of support from commercial service providers who have helped us with the necessary insights which we needed to take this project forward. We hope to be able to continue with these relationships as we ourselves begin to help others as they establish open source units of their own.

We are constantly amazed to find the specialist services that are available as open sources and the range and quality of information that they can provide. In many cases it may be that these services will be of limited use to us at Scotland Yard but we are always quick to tell others in the Open Source community who we think might benefit.

Other advantages, such as the sanitising of routes of enquiry and extending the communal availability of resources will make alliances with police, National Criminal Intelligence, defence and security services and maybe many more, a very effective user group.

Despite this progress, the truth is that we are still some way from finding the funds for the 'big picture' open source model that many would patronise. With all of the other demands on almost standstill budgets police are constrained from making available vast financial resources to fund academic research into intelligence related projects. We do believe, however, that small effective cartels working in the Open Source arena can make a

significant impact and compensate for other areas where we do not enjoy the same resources as the private sector or large US government departments. We are heartened by the significant interest that has been shown by our open source partners in working closely with the Metropolitan Police in the UK. Taking these partnerships across the ocean is an exciting thought and I dare say that there will be informal discussions about that before we leave this conference.

I would now like to spend a few minutes dealing with an area where we see the future growth of open source within the Metropolitan Police and take the opportunity to extol some of the other good work that has been initiated from the Directorate of Intelligence.

Like many other law enforcement departments around the world the Metropolitan Police has gone through significant change over the past 5 years. Tighter controls on budgets and more accountability have led us – belatedly in my view – to Policing by Objectives and Intelligence Led Policing. In short we have to show that the money which the public pay for their police service is well spent and that we are anxiously engaged in reducing crime, catching and convicting criminals and that we reflect the priorities of our communities in the work we undertake.

As far as Intelligence Led policing is concerned a certain amount of restructuring – both intellectually *and* organisationally was required for us to make the changes necessary to achieve our corporate intelligence strategy. Having restructured Divisional and Area Intelligence Units and staffed them with motivated and committed intelligence staff we have recently turned our attention to changes at the centre of our organisation – New Scotland Yard.

We have recently established a new Strategic Intelligence Group within the Directorate of Intelligence which will give valuable long-sighted support to operational policing at the highest levels within the metropolis of London. Concentrating on five main areas at first – Drugs, Series Sexual Offences, Commercial Armed Robbery, Firearms, and Murder we aim to deliver strategic intelligence packages to crime commanders and specialist units that will better equip them to target the problem areas – and criminals of the future before they can become established.

For example – a significant seizure of drugs and/or drug traffickers in Turkey yesterday could have important implications for the streets of London in 6 or 12 months time. It is well documented that these seizures do hit the criminal fraternity hard on occasions and the 'knock-on' effect should be more closely monitored and anticipated by the police and customs agencies.

The release of 5,000 AK47 rifles onto the black market could have significant ramifications for drugs, firearms and terrorist operations in many countries and metropolitan cities around the world.

A missing consignment of Semtex reported in South America might take some months to come to notice through normal police channels, whereas open source monitoring could identify it as a potential terrorist threat within hours of its disappearance.

There are other areas that we could point to as indications of our open source successes. Many of these operations are ongoing and although I can share some examples some of the details have been changed to protect the 'guilty'.

Just recently we were sent a file from Interpol, through the usual channels at our NCIS, which related to the illegal smuggling of explosives. One particular man was known to be involved and all attempts were being made to link this man to the smuggling of materials into Middle Eastern countries. Our open source unit began researching the known suspect and quickly established that he was involved in a number of British and foreign companies. By analysing the lists of director's names from those companies and subjecting them to similar scrutiny we were able to find a co-director of a European export company, who was from the Middle East, with addresses both there and in Europe. The connection was made and the file returned to Interpol. Total turnaround time in the open source unit – 30 minutes.

Other more, 'bread and butter' cases include the many instances of murderers, rapists and other undesirable elements of our society who are identified through informants and technical resources.

In these cases the investigating officer is obviously not given full names, dates of birth, addresses or criminal record numbers. The open source unit continues to identify many serious criminals where the investigating officer knows only a first or last name and a rough idea of where that person lives. Where we are unable to pinpoint the suspect exactly we are usually able to point an investigator at the most likely two or three culprits.

328

I'm sure many of you are familiar with cases where open sources have found information far cheaper than the cost of an officers time in pursuing 'analogue' lines of research. In some cases we have returned intelligence which officers would never have got by following the normal lines of enquiry.

Data Protection legislation does, on occasion, frustrate our efforts and invariably legislation lags behind major advances, whether technology, communications or other aspects of our rapidly changing society. In the UK the government is consulting on the scope of new freedom of information legislation incorporating European Conventions. It is for my responsibility and that of my law enforcement colleagues to ensure that our concerns are recognised during this period.

It is possible that the present lobbying from the larger service providers will bring long awaited changes to some of the data protection attitudes but that will not happen for some time. In the meantime it is our contention that the investigative world, generally, has only just begun to scratch the surface of the sources available to it.

In the United States you have access to much more personal data than we are allowed in the UK and Europe. Computers hold details about our finances, credit, debts, banking, accommodation, income, employment, medical details, transport modes, education, military service, taxes, social security, land registry, immigration, travel, holidays, spending, shopping, professional information, associates, family and extended family, business and company information, demographic information... and much more. Given that some of this data is protected in some way or another it is still a provoking thought to imagine having access to all of that information about our best target criminals.

We are quite proud that in the short time that we have been running an open source bureau we have developed the capability to find out personal information on almost any adult criminal in the United Kingdom. We can access records about all limited and non-limited companies including accounts, director's details and company trading. We are able to access, on-line, the history of all commercial property transactions and details of the national land registry giving us information which is useful in both strategic and tactical operations.

We are also able to extend our research into many countries around the world and have links that provide us company and news information in English from less obvious places such as Russia, The Baltic States, South America, China and India amongst many others. Even in this short space of time we have made use of overseas open sources to assist investigations around national security, terrorism, international fraud, extradition and many aspects of organised and serious crime.

This brings me on to the subject of transatlantic drug crime. This particular area of investigation and intelligence gathering is aided greatly by the ability to identify international trends in drug abuse and harm reduction methods. In addition to areas where investigations are assisted by the immediacy of on-line information relating to targets who come from abroad we still find a great use for the academic, journalistic and other accredited sources from which we exploit the very latest information. The official wheels of the Interpol machine have a proper and indispensable place in the investigative process but we are finding more and more examples of cases where the environment of modems, fibre-optic cable and ISDN lines present detectives with a world *without frontiers* where investigations can move at the speed necessary to keep pace with the criminal of the electronic age.

Using the services of companies such as Lexis-Nexis, ISI Internet Securities and Experian we are able to conduct financial investigations into individuals from many countries indulging the USA. The abundance of proliferation of information, both personal and corporate in the United States has global implications for law enforcement as well as financial analysis. We often find ourselves making efficient use of services that have, until recently, been the protected domain of the financial sector. It may or may not come as a surprise to know that from the seemingly sleepy shores of our little island we can, with very little primary information, build sophisticated intelligence profiles of the lifestyles, incomes, property and assets of criminals that operate in the UK from this side of the Atlantic.

Another useful part of our open source development has been our partnership with our Ministry of Defence Evaluation and Research Agency to help develop their Open Source technology 'DELOS'. This will enable the Open Source package, in use by the military and government, to have more relevance to law enforcement and also gives us, the cops, a pretty powerful tool capable of delivering a variety of intelligence related services directly to our detectives and analysts. Other initiatives with companies such as Lexis® Nexis® are aimed at developing a strategically beneficial environment for the exploitation of open sources in law enforcement throughout Europe.

Before I conclude I would just like to say a few words about how we have set up our own open source unit and it's plans for the future. Open source analysis is really not much different from any other type of intelligence analysis. It requires a dedicated analytical approach and it will employ and test the resources of the most

tenacious researchers. We do not believe that you can sit just anybody in an open source unit and expect him or her to produce good results. Our own experience has shown that the pursuit of an enquiry in many directions using lateral and dogmatic determination is sometimes the only way to get results. In many cases we have managed to return valuable information to an investigator only because we refused to accept the first 20 or so failures. Open source research deserves no less investment in human resources than any other area of intelligence research and analysis.

Additionally we need to consider that an open source unit needs room for development and expansion. Due to the changing world of information technology – and I use that term in it's truest sense – there will always be new opportunities and interesting developments in this area. Any open source unit needs proper support to enable the investigation of new sources – and the acquisition of those sources that will give us the best results. It seems ludicrous that organisations are willing to invest large sums of money in a wages bill for staff but will not invest small sums of money in order to give those same staff the opportunity to make a return on their investment. To paraphrase another Englishman, Winston Churchill, we need to give them the tools to do the job.

We intend to carefully monitor the demands on our open source unit and match that with suitably qualified and capable personnel. My staff know that they can expect my full support for the development of this unit - we began by ensuring that all activities were totally covert and that all transactions were conducted through covert names and businesses. Steve Edwards has the same type of covert identity, bank account and business credentials as our undercover officers use and through this we ensure that none of our enquiries are traceable back to a police origin.

Our open source unit became operational in January this year after we had already seen the benefits of it's use in operational and tactical intelligence gathering. We are now seeing similar good results in our use for strategic analysis.

As I have said, we have only just begun to open some of the closed doors and we have a long road ahead of us which we will find interesting and challenging. Someone once said. *'When you can't do everything, just do something.'* For the immediate future, at least the wonderful open source machinery that so many of you seem to enjoy is just too unwieldy for most public sector users in the UK such as ourselves.

It will only be by proving our worth and delivering quality timely intelligence that we can hope to establish the future of open sources in law enforcement circles. These sources have been behind closed doors for too long – but the doors are seldom locked! We need the tenacity to find the doors, the patience to open them and the foresight to use their contents wisely.

PROCEEDINGS 1998 7th International Conference & Exhibit OPEN SOURCE SOLUTIONS: Global Intelligence Forum - Link Page

[Previous](#) [OSS '98 Helen Burwell, Commercial Online Source Validation Methods,](#)

[Next](#) [OSS '98 Nate Boyer, Commercial Imagery Support Options: Trade-Offs and Value-Added,](#)

[Return to Electronic Index Page](#)