

Neustar Helps to Fight Online Crime at the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary



The Challenge

Devon and Cornwall Constabulary's Force Online Investigation Unit was formed in 2001 to examine the threat which Internet crime posed to the people of Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. There is growing concern in the UK about online crime and the number of offences has increased over the past few years. The detection and prevention of online crime brings with it its own specific obstacles. Those attacking online sites are becoming more intelligent and are finding new ways of hiding their identity or their location. Fighting this particular type of criminality requires its own special techniques to track down offenders and protect legitimate Internet users.

In particular, the department faced three specific challenges when dealing with Level 2 Criminality:

Paedophile Tracking – knowing the location of an Internet paedophile is critical to assessing the risk that they pose to potential victims. The police needed to be able to quickly and efficiently judge whether or not a paedophile posed an immediate threat to their victims – for instance if they were located within the same country, region, or town.

Internet Fraud – traders on popular retail sites such as eBay are increasingly being subjected to fraudulent activity in relation to stolen credit cards and money laundering scams. The police department required a way in which to accurately track Internet protocol (IP) addresses and cross reference with locations in order to support their investigations.

Allocation of Resources – a result of the previously mentioned activities was that investigations were often carried out without the knowledge that a criminal was in fact based outside of the Devon and Cornwall area, thus falling under the jurisdiction of another police force. This led to a huge and often unnecessary drain on resources.

The Solution

The Unit at Devon and Cornwall Constabulary recognised the role IP geolocation could play in the detection of online crime and made a decision to implement it as part of their overall strategy. This technology

“Online crime has seen a significant rise, roughly doubling year-on-year, with more and more transactions taking place over the Internet and more illicit material being made available to a wider audience. IP geolocation is just one of the many tools we are using to prevent this problem, as being able to determine the location of the perpetrator is saving us both time and ultimately money. Neustar provided us with a simple way of doing things that helps us to speed up our reaction time and make fast judgements in what could be life threatening situations.”

— Detective Inspector
Simon Snell

can locate virtually any visitor to a Web site, regardless of the type of Internet connection or device. In essence, it can provide data on where and how Web visitors are connecting to a Web site.

Neustar was chosen due to its already outstanding reputation and also because of the specific information it could provide the police force. Once alerted to a possible fraud attempt or abuse case by members of the public, or as part of ongoing investigations, the Unit's specially trained detectives analysed the Neustar IP address data of the offender. Once given a location, the force was then able to take immediate action by either following up itself, or passing the investigation on to colleagues in other counties.

In the case of online abuse, the Unit makes an assessment based on the perpetrator's location – if they are within the same region or town, they can straight away move to protect the victim and intercept the criminal. When fraudulent attempts were made on sites, such as eBay, the Unit can follow up the investigation itself if it is within its jurisdiction, or pass information on to colleagues if outside of the catchment area. On average, the Unit looks up 20–30 IP addresses per week as part of its Investigations, with many of these playing a vital part in supporting ongoing cases or allowing the force to quickly allocate cases to other regions.

The Results

Since using Neustar's IP geolocation data, Devon and Cornwall Constabulary has experienced significant benefits including driving up the rates of successful investigations, whilst dramatically reducing the amount of time wasted following up investigations outside the area. In a recent case of online abuse, the Unit was able to track down and apprehend a sex offender with the help of Neustar's data. Having been alerted to the criminal by a worried parent, the police were able to quickly look up the offender's IP address location data and find out where in the region he was logging from. Having discovered that the proximity of the offender to the victim was dangerously close, the force was able to deploy officers immediately and, in coordination with other departments, make a successful arrest.

Allocating resources has become a fast and efficient process and has seen a direct benefit from the adoption of IP geolocation technology. By having the ability to identify where a potential criminal is operating from, the force can quickly take action. If the alleged criminal behaviour is occurring in another region, the Constabulary can alert the appropriate authorities by sending an intelligence package, including location details, enabling them to tackle this criminal activity in their area. This has freed up resources, allowing more time to be spent on relevant and critical activities within the Devon and Cornwall area.

About Neustar

Neustar enables online businesses to instantly identify where a visitor to their Web site is geographically located. Online companies including broadcasters, e-retailers, ad networks, banks, and government agencies integrate Neustar's IP geolocation data into their Web applications to geotarget their advertising and content, detect card-not-present fraud, manage distribution of digital content, comply with local laws, and more. Neustar delivers detailed demographic and network characteristic data about an IP address and the data is 99.9% accurate at the country level and up to 98.2% accurate at the US state level (attested to by Pricewaterhouse Coopers). www.neustar.biz/ipintel