

GOING MOBILE:

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THE POSSIBILITIES?



The pandemic has pushed public safety communications outside the office.

By Todd Neumann

The COVID-19 pandemic has, if nothing else, taught us to overcome and think outside the box. Thankfully, we had the power of technology to help us overcome the obstacles of distancing and separation to prevent the spread of this disease while still delivering essential services. Consider the ramifications had COVID-19 emerged 20 years ago:

- Computers were bulkier and required more in terms of space, power, peripherals and in-person tech support.
- Networks were less robust—forget the Wi-Fi, 5G and fiber internet of today.
- Meetings were much more efficient when conducted in person. Who knew Zoom was coming? Teams meant your local baseball team, not

a platform that allows you to share with a group that might be located on different continents.

- Sharing information often meant someone had to come into the center to get the paperwork or find a fax machine.
- In many emergency communications centers (ECCs) “on the console” still meant you were sitting at a console, pushing buttons and entering data into a computer-aided dispatch (CAD) screen that was attached to a bulky mainframe computer in a back room.

In 2021 a computer fits in the palm of your hand and we have the advantage of a globally connected network. While the COVID-19 threat is still a real and daily obstacle to overcome, it’s time to take the benefits of the pandemic and examine how ECCs can use these tools outside the box as we move forward. One of those tools is our CAD system.

CAD used to be something that was physically tied to the ECC, but that isn’t the case anymore. Many, if not most, CAD software can be installed on a laptop or many laptops. Combine that laptop with a virtual private network license or another secure network

access, and you’ve made a powerful tool even more powerful. Is your CAD software capable of doing this, and have you thought about how you can use it outside the center? My CAD and radio console exist on laptop computers. The technology would even allow a telecommunicator to work from home.

My county has used CAD in a mobile application in a variety of situations:

- Alpine Valley Music Theater is in our county, and we routinely dispatched units on the grounds directly from our command post. The ECC put calls in the pending queue and a public safety telecommunicator in the command post took it from there.
- We operate a mobile command post for major emergencies. With mobile CAD a telecommunicator or trained officer can log and document significant events, allowing a smaller communications center to focus on routine duties.
- A trained officer or firefighter can assume the duties of an incident dispatcher at the scene. In my county we are expanding our mobile footprint into our fire apparatus. We have volunteer agencies and many of them have aging membership who still

want to show up and do something on the fireground. We want to train those members on basic CAD functions to serve as the incident commander’s scribe in the field, taking pressure off of the ECC. We have the CAD installed in our mobile data computer terminals so we can now pull up to a scene and use the CAD to organize and direct operations.

Now think even further outside the box about continuity of operations. 9-1-1 cannot shut the doors in the event of a fire, tornado or a flood. With a backup server in the cloud and a set of laptops for CAD, radio and 9-1-1, your center could set up a reasonably working 9-1-1 operation in a school library, a church, another police department, a tent or even in our private homes—maintaining operations while a more permanent arrangements is developed.

No doubt that when the threat is over, we will all be thankful, but we should also be thankful for the possibilities that the pandemic has presented to us. ●

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