

'Ask the Police' Website & Database



Police National Legal Database

PNLD have compiled a database over 500 frequently asked questions that the police are asked by the general public on a daily basis

Using PDMS' Foundations TM for content management platform the database has been published on the internet, available to both police call handlers and the general public

It is estimated that the database will provide cost savings of over £2 million per annum

"This product is essential for members of the public. Its award earlier this year for the Most Effective Use of IT in the Public Service was purely down to the ease and simplicity of use of the product. This was a brilliant project to be involved in which was completed and launched in ten weeks. Working together in partnership instead of as a customer/supplier, PNL D and PDMS have created solutions which are second to none."

Click here to see a video about the PNL D project [Heather Croft Business Director, PNL D](#)

Solution

PNLD had already worked with PDMS on the successful new version of the PNL D system and their Foundations TM content management system provided an ideal platform on which to base the development of the new FAQ project. The system is hosted centrally and uses a Microsoft SQL Server database for the data storage and retrieval.

As well as featuring a wide selection of nationally asked questions, the system has been designed to allow individual Police Forces to submit their own information and FAQs to provide a service specifically tailored to their local audience. The nominated individual within each local call handling team can access the database directly to add the information relevant to their area; information is updated as soon as there are changes. Members of the public using the system can access the information relevant to their particular region by entering their town name or highlighting their region on the map on the home page.

Both Call Handlers and members of the public can suggest their own questions through the 'ask a question facility', if the question they are seeking information on is not there. The site has been designed to be as intuitive and easy to use as possible, with the top ten questions automatically compiled, a comprehensive search facility, the ability to e-mail the information directly to someone else and to rate each individual question in terms of usefulness.

PDMS completed the FAQ database within a 3 month time frame and the first phase, the public facing website, was launched by Home Office Minister, Hazel Blears MP in March 2005. The roll out to the Call Handlers is now being undertaken in phases to allow PNL D and PDMS to deliver a training programme to the administrators within each force who will be adding local content.

Challenge

The Police National Legal Database team, based at West Yorkshire Police, produce the PNLD database of legal information which is used by all 43 police forces in England and Wales. PNLD saw an opportunity to develop a national UK police database of frequently asked questions that would not only be of benefit to the police but also improve the service provided to the general public.

Every week the police receive thousands of non-emergency calls from members of the public. Important as they are, these calls are time consuming and many of them will be questions about routine aspects of the criminal law and police procedures. Many of these questions will be repeated hundreds of times over – simply because members of the public have no other way of finding the relevant information.

To help resolve this issue, PNLD compiled a database of more than 500 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) providing information about situations people come across in their everyday life, such as personal safety, anti-social behaviour, reporting a road traffic collision to the police and fixed penalty notices.

The FAQ database is an invaluable resource to police Call Handlers who will have quick and easy access to information to enable them to respond more quickly to enquiries from the general public. However, to reduce the number of calls received in the first instance, it was decided to give the general public access to the database through a website www.askthe.police.uk.

Results

The FAQ database is an invaluable resource for staff of police call centres and members of the public. It saves time, ensures more consistency in responses to the questions that are troubling callers and helps to deliver vital time savings for front line police officers. The ability to add regionally relevant information is an added bonus, enabling individual police forces to provide information to their local area and community.

In the first 5 months since its launch the general public have read approximately 150,000 questions on the FAQ site and this figure will increase as the database is rolled out to the Call Handlers.

The FAQ project is extremely cost effective. By implementing one central national database, it is estimated that PNLD have saved resources of approximately £1.7 million. It is also estimated that the database will provide cost savings of over £2 million per annum, with a significant reduction in the number of calls coming through to police Call Handlers

The "ask the police" website and database was a runner-up in the prestigious Information Age Effective IT Awards 2005 in the Most Effective Use of IT in Public Service category, with both PNLD and PDMS receiving commendations.