



Scott McPherson
Tiptoeing Through Minefields

We have met the enemy, and he is us.

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http://blogs.computerworld.com/we_have_met_the_enemy_and_he_is_us

Let me tell you another story. While CIO at Florida's corrections agency, I fought for years to have a company out of Louisville called Appriss come in to hook into our mainframe. Appriss has this amazing product, called JusticeXchange. This company gets its hooks into city and county jail management and booking computer systems. It can then match arrest and booking data with State and Federal computer systems.

The benefit is that a probation officer can be electronically notified if one of their probationers is arrested anywhere in America that Appriss operates (about 70% of U.S. jail management systems, as of two years ago). And it works. The Florida Department of Corrections finally gave the green light to the project, and used it first as a pilot to find some of the 40,000+ 'absconders" who are on the lam, as they say.

JusticeXchange found about ten percent of the absconders, who were either tucked away in other jails or were on probation in other states! That is more than 4,000 absconders. By the way, about a half-dozen were actually in Florida jails, under their own names! Human failings caused those names never to have been checked against other criminal databases.

Today, in Florida (or at least when I left Corrections), if any inmate or probationer got arrested for anything anywhere within Appriss' reach, a probation officer was electronically and automatically notified -- as was his/her supervisor -- within fifty minutes of the person being booked into a jail, and well before they might be able to bond out at First Appearance. If that does not underscore the power of information sharing, I cannot tell you what does.

Scott McPherson is Chief Information Officer (CIO) for the Florida House of Representatives. He has served in that same capacity for the Florida Department of Corrections and has been a technology and communications consultant for nearly 20 years.