

# Case Study

## GroupSystems Success Story: Hertfordshire Constabulary

### *Hertfordshire County, UK, Earns 'Innovation in Crime Prevention' Award*

Most homicides are solved within days; about 90 percent of murder victims knew the perpetrator. But when cases are more complex, solving them requires a methodical, in-depth investigation.

For the Hertfordshire Constabulary, the police department for the County of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom, that means taking a collaborative approach to solving homicides and the causes of homicides. Hertfordshire County, just north of London, is home to 1.1 million people, and sees about 15 homicides and 50 road deaths annually.

The department brings together all detectives, administrators and forensic scientists to uncover new ideas, ask questions and propose theories.

When the department wanted to take a closer look at cold cases, and devise ways to reduce overall homicide rates, it was concerned that hierarchies would get in the way of true brainstorming and prevent desired breakthroughs.

"Conventional, group-based oral discussion lets two to three people have more influence than is fair," said DCS Chris Miller. "And it's very difficult to get all agencies together physically."

#### **Collaboration Nets New Ideas**

Hertfordshire Constabulary turned to Steve Bather of Realise (Europe) Limited for help in conducting collaborative meetings. A GroupSystems partner, Realise uses GroupSystems' ThinkTank to bring dynamic collaboration to workshops, conference facilitation and team building.

Realise worked with Hertfordshire to define issues and identify the best approach. "It was the perfect opportunity to use GroupSystems' ThinkTank solution," said Steve Bather. "ThinkTank opens up groups to new ideas, radical discussion and breakthrough thinking – which was needed in both cold case murder reviews and multi-agency homicide reduction workshops."

#### **Cold Case Murder Reviews**

For cold case murder reviews, Hertfordshire brings together all parties for a one-day session. First, a detective briefs the group on a case or problem. Then Realise introduces ThinkTank with an ice-breaker activity. Every participant has his or her own access to ThinkTank, often from different locations, either on computers provided by Realise or the Constabulary's own computers.

**"With ThinkTank, we're identifying causes and effects of homicides with a view toward developing a process internally and with partner agencies to reduce the likelihood that incidents might lead to murder."**

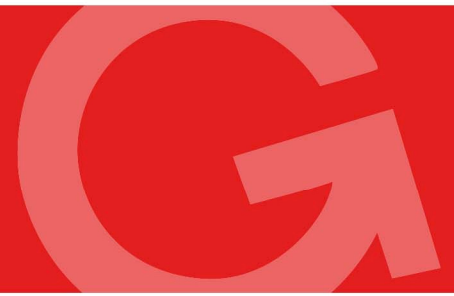
— Chris Miller, Detective Chief Superintendent

**Customer**  
Hertfordshire County, UK

#### **Business Benefits of ThinkTank**

- Hertfordshire Police concluded a number of complex cold cases after ThinkTank workshops.
- With new ways of preventing alcohol-related crimes in three county towns, Hertfordshire contributed to a 33% decrease in grievous bodily harm and a 22% reduction in actual bodily harm.
- The Constabulary won a National award for "Innovation in Crime Prevention."

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During the initial brainstorm of ideas and questions, all submissions remain anonymous. That anonymity gives participants the ability to contribute freely and submit all the questions, ideas, insights and theories they have. They are encouraged to input the most obvious ideas they might assume the lead team have already considered as well as more far-out ideas. All participants and perspectives are given a “voice” through the ThinkTank technology.

ThinkTank elicits dozens of ideas in minutes from all parties simultaneously, rather than a few people dominating conversation. Every idea has the potential for further discussion instead of being discounted by outspoken individuals. The group then reviews all facts and theories, further developing groups of ideas into lines of inquiry.

“Using ThinkTank, we get a lot of work out of a lot of people quickly,” Miller said. “People are actively engaged in the process and everyone’s voice is heard.”

Using ThinkTank’s prioritization and voting features, participants then rank and rate the lines of inquiry. They take into consideration the potential impact on the case and ease of investigation. The outcome: A ranked list of options for the lead detective to pursue.

“There is a new commitment, energy and focus on a smaller number of viable options,” Bather said.

Before concluding, the group identifies next steps, who should own those steps, expectations and timeframes. At the end of the workshop, Realise taps ThinkTank for instant reporting to publish the session outcomes. The reports can also be edited to generate summary data valuable to senior management, the victim’s family, the press or for legal progress reporting.

## Homicide Reduction Strategies

Hertfordshire Constabulary has also engaged ThinkTank and Realise to encourage collaboration at intra- and inter-agency meetings, focused on specific types of homicide (e.g. alcohol-fuelled homicide, road deaths, domestic violence, knife crime, etc.). Relevant agencies attend the day-long discussion supported by ThinkTank to seek a better understanding of the conditions that trigger different types of incidents.

The groups of up to 60 participants brainstorm, discuss, prioritize and jointly develop strategies to mitigate serious incidents and homicides. Towards the end of the workshop, the participants are invited to commit to a small number of pragmatic strategies they feel will maximize the outcome. With diligent commitment and effective follow up, the County implemented a number of solutions and strategies – and as a result, there has been a reduction in homicides in the County.

Senior detectives now apply this approach to live investigations, learning reviews and multi-team coordination. The Constabulary elicits more ideas from participants, more quickly, ensures that complete team thinking is included and that all voices are heard, and captures and processes all information collaboratively.

## Reducing and Solving Crimes

As a result, the Constabulary has refreshed a number of complex cold cases, triggered by new theories raised in ThinkTank workshops. Further diligent police detective work helped build new cases that were brought to prosecution and resolution.

The multi-agency homicide reduction workshops also resulted in proactive new ways of preventing alcohol-related crimes in three county towns. The pilot schemes were so successful that the approach was extended to other major cities and towns in the county. Over the same period, Hertfordshire saw a 33 percent decrease in grievous bodily harm and a 22 percent reduction in actual bodily harm.

The Homicide reduction team also won an award for “Innovation in Crime Prevention.”

“With ThinkTank, we’re identifying causes and effects of homicides with a view toward developing a process internally and with partner agencies to reduce the likelihood that incidents might lead to murder,” Miller said.



**GroupSystems**

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