

IDOX helps York crack down on Rogue Traders

The City of York Council's Trading Standards Department has taken an innovative step towards solving a major rogue-trading problem through the application of groundbreaking knowledge management technology and using the information management expertise of award-winning e-government solutions provider, IDOX plc.

Part of York's legal duty is to investigate fraudulent traders posing as private individuals when selling goods or services. IDOX's objective was to provide them with electronic means of checking local and national publications (for example, Auto Trader magazine) for suspicious phone numbers.

The phone number is often the only aspect that can link one potentially fraudulent advert to another. If a significant number of adverts use the same number, yet are classified in the 'private' section, then there may be cause to investigate. Previously, performing this job manually was almost an impossible task, a chore which was prohibitively expensive. York estimates that it would take two officers on a full-time basis, in each local authority, to carry it out. That equates to 60 officers across 12 local authorities. Using IDOX Software, one person can now perform the job of many.

Remarkable Results

IDOX Software has delivered such a significant impact in the first two months of the project that it has already highlighted 138 potential offenders involving the sale of over 600 vehicles, parts and other articles in the Yorkshire and Humberside region.

This compares extremely favourably to the previous scenario, where manual checking led to only two cases being highlighted throughout the whole of last year.

Colin Rumford, the Head of Trading Standards at York tells us, "The results have been immeasurable. In reality, nobody was actually doing this work before. It was considered to be too resource-intensive. IDOX's unique

product greatly improves the service that we are able to offer the public to protect them from unscrupulous sellers. The system has surpassed all expectations in both the quality and quantity of the outputs given."

An additional benefit is the quality of the case files that officers can now produce. Officers are able to compile electronic dossiers on a particular suspect and, as the system remains live, it will continue to highlight subsequent adverts that contain the phone number under investigation, thus keeping the file totally up-to-date. The resulting accuracy and format quality means the evidence is highly persuasive and legally admissible in court.

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Colin Rumford states that, "Being able to search for partial or complete phone numbers in this way is a huge benefit when investigating cases. The systems ability to inform officers of the frequency of certain numbers appearing across publications, even when they contain different text formats, is also immensely clever. Because IDOX Software is a fully web-based system it also enables officers from any participating agency to add documents for analysis and run a query from any PC anywhere."

The Long Arm of the Law

As well as York Trading Standards, twelve other local authorities and government agencies will make use of the facilities based at York. It is intended that York will operate the system as a central resource for surrounding boroughs and regional enforcement agencies. This will enable



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a number of government agencies such as the Police, Customs and Excise, Immigration, and Trading Standards to cross reference their intelligence information. Meanwhile, York is already examining ways of securing central government funding to expand the original specification of their IDOX Software Trading Standards system further still.

Andrew Fraser, CEO of IDOX plc, explains that, "In effect, the system we have delivered is a direct result of the partnership philosophy that IDOX operates with all of its clients. This has enabled us to look at the issues involved from the same perception as the officers who work on the front line on a daily basis, trying to tackle fraud head on. With this unique insight we were able to deliver a technical solution that has in turn enabled York Trading Standards to strengthen its links with other enforcement agencies, as well as improving consumer confidence".

He continues, "The IDOX Software Trading Standards system is one of the first within this market sector. The numerous features that help trading standards officers catch these con men are a real benefit to the Yorkshire, and wider, business communities."

Colin Rumford of York adds, "IDOX Software has exceeded all expectations. The whole project was completed on time and in budget, taking only six months. The result of the unique collaboration between IDOX and York Trading Standards is a superb testament to the partnership principal."

IDOX has developed a unique algorithm (the knowledge management component of IDOX Software) that enables phone numbers to be identified, stripped out and populated into a table within its database.

The first time a publication is indexed into IDOX Software the system returns a list of all phone numbers contained within it and their frequency.

Selecting a phone number from this list (or any search result) opens a page that contains links to all the pages that contain that number.

The officer then has the option of opening a text version of the page or a PDF image. Within the text version a link takes the officer straight to the highlighted phone number.

The complete advert can then be copied as a text file and pasted into a Microsoft Word document, for example, to build up a case file.

Selecting the PDF link will open an image of the scanned page, which then zooms in automatically to the appropriate advert and highlights the relevant phone number.

If required, the officer also has the option of opening a graphic version of the page, allowing them to copy an actual image of the advert to a Microsoft Word file.

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