How the Bristol Township Police Department is using rugged tablets to keep officers on the street.
NESTLED IN SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA,
Bristol Township is a small, tight-knit community focused on creating a safe, clean, positive environment for its residents. To support that effort, the Bristol Township Police Department equips officers with rugged tablets to ensure their time is spent protecting the public — not in an office writing incident reports.

At one time, Bristol police officers went into the field armed with a pen and paper — information was logged on 4-inch by 7-inch notepads and then transcribed in the office. In a report-driven environment such as law enforcement, neatness, timeliness and efficiency are crucial — and handwritten notes don’t fit the bill.

“It takes the officers off the street,” says Bristol Township’s Det. Robert Lebo. “If you’ve got two or three burglaries, you’ve got two or three guys off the street. You need to keep them in the field. Even if they’re just sitting out there entering report data into their tablet in real time, they’re a deterrent because they are visible to people.”

Local patrol officers have been using mobile devices for nearly 15 years for everything from report writing to accessing critical information. However, after several iterations and mobile device implementations, Bristol Township Police Department plans to standardize on Xplore tablets — rugged mobile computers that are made to withstand the harshest and most extreme working environments.

Approximately one-third of the township’s patrol cars are outfitted with the Xplore rugged tablets, with plans to move the entire patrol fleet to the tablets in the near future. According to Det. Lebo, the 12.1-inch Xplore tablets are cost effective and meet the unique needs of the police force.

MOBILITY
Officers can use the large-screen, lightweight tablets to write incident reports, log information and access the county’s dispatch system using a digital pen, attached keyboard or touch-screen. Because each of the department’s tablets includes built-in connectivity capabilities, officers have access to records management systems, software, and local and federal databases such as CJIS.

“We use a virtual private network connection — a VPN — and we use remote desktop protocol which gives us full functionality whether we’re sitting at a PC in the station or using the tablet out in the car,” says Det. Lebo. “Our crimes codes, local ordinances, scheduling program, map books and emails are available in the car and in the field. Anything you can do from a PC in the station you can do with the tablet while on foot or on the move.”

Officers can even use the tablets in the station in place of a traditional computer or laptop. Because Xplore’s tablets are not hard-installed into patrol cars, officers can use them in and out of their vehicle — even bringing them home to finish reports if needed. “There’s a lot of benefit to that — officers can take their work with them,” says Det. Lebo.

SECURITY
Most police departments adhere to multi-layer authentication guidelines established by their state or the federal government, which Xplore’s purpose-built tablets support. There are three types of secondary authentication commonly used — something you are (biometrics), something you know (password) and something you have (smart card). The Bristol Township Police Department currently uses passwords and email access codes
on the tablets, however, they may transition to other methods. “The plan is to eventually use biometrics,” says Det. Lebo. “You can get a secondary device that does that, but Xplore tablet computers already have that functionality.”

RUGGED FEATURES
Police officers work in a variety of demanding environments that typical corporate machines are not equipped to handle. “Our devices need to hold up to harsh environments,” says Det. Lebo. “There’s extreme heat inside of a car if it’s locked up and closed. And cold temperatures as well. Any mobile computer we use in the field has to meet military specs for the most part.” Xplore MIL-STD-810G certified and IP-rated tablets are outfitted with a number of rugged features, including damage-resistant screens and the ability to withstand drops. They’re also resistant to water and dust exposure, humidity, extreme temperatures, and vibration and shock. Even after one or two drops, the police department’s Xplore tablets have come out unscathed.

FUNCTIONALITY
At one time, officers used digital cameras to take photos for evidence. After capturing the images, they would connect the digital camera to an in-car laptop or office-based PC to transfer the files and then upload them to the appropriate records management system. However, digital cameras are not intended to be used in harsh operating environments, and the police department couldn’t afford to purchase new cameras every few years. The department’s Xplore tablets feature built-in cameras so officers can seamlessly capture and upload photos. “If you’re taking a picture, it’s right there, you’re not fumbling with a camera and connecting anything to the device and transferring files back and forth. It’s truly all in one,” says Det. Lebo. Even better is that you have a full computer in a very condensed and usable form factor.

TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP
Like most agencies, budget is a concern for the Bristol Township Police Department. According to Det. Lebo, there are a variety of rugged mobile computers on the market, some even developed specifically for law enforcement personnel. However, they are significantly more expensive than the rugged tablet solutions that Xplore has designed for public safety use. “Every other mobile computer out there right now is twice the cost of the Xplore tablets, regardless of form factor. And the Xplore tablets offer the same functionality as the other devices we were using, with the bonus that they are mobile — the other devices are not,” he says. But the department didn’t just consider the sticker price when making their selection. They wanted mobile computers that would keep their overall mobility and IT costs down over the entire life of ownership. The Xplore tablets proved to be flexible, adaptable and scalable across all workflows — and they were highly compatible with the department’s back office systems, in-vehicle solution requirements and officers’ working styles.

EASE OF USE
Aside from ensuring everything was connected properly on the backend, Det. Lebo says the implementation of the Xplore tablets was painless and required very little training for the officers. “As long as the backend is set up right, there’s really no training needed.”

There’s no doubt the police department is pleased with the Xplore tablets — they’re rugged, cost effective and easy to use. They’re also helping the department operate more efficiently, allowing officers to spend more time protecting the public. “It keeps them in the field. They are mobile all the time and always available,” says Det. Lebo.

RELIABILITY
Traditional office-based computers are not built for rugged environments because of their sometimes fragile components, limited connectivity options and short battery life. For employees in the field who encounter harsh environments, stability and longevity of a tablet is crucial. It’s important agencies select a device that will be reliable throughout a responder’s shift — no matter where that is — free from disconnects or disruptions. For example, Xplore tablets provide officers in the Bristol Township Police Department with a long battery life and are reliable enough to last for years. By moving to Xplore tablets, the township no longer has to plan to rebuild or replace its mobile devices year after year.

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— Det. Robert Lebo  
Bristol Township Police Department
Xplore is The Rugged Tablet Authority™, exclusively manufacturing powerful, long-lasting, and customer-defined rugged tablet PCs since 1996. Today, Xplore offers the broadest portfolio of genuinely rugged tablets — and the most complete lineup of rugged tablet accessories — on Earth.

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