“There’s no comparison between Monolith and an Excel spreadsheet. If there’s a piece of evidence sitting on my desk and I scan the barcode, all the case information pops up. That’s a huge time-saver.”

JEFF PELLETIER,
Sergeant, Boulder County Digital Forensics Lab
The Boulder County Digital Forensics Lab provides digital forensics services to law enforcement agencies in the State of Colorado.

HIGHLIGHTS

Challenges
- Consolidating case management for 8 agencies
- Managing a huge caseload from multiple jurisdictions
- Streamlining evidence analysis requests
- Maintaining chain of custody
- Simplifying evidence retrieval

Solution
- Single source of truth for all case inquiries
- Complete control and visibility into caseload
- Unbreakable chain of custody
- Precise evidence tracking

Results
- Streamlined and centralized case management system
- Decrease the time it takes to pull data from 8-10 hours to minutes
- Remote investigation oversight

Challenges

Centralizing case management for 8 law enforcement agencies

Jeff Pelletier, a Sergeant at the Boulder County Digital Forensics Lab, had an exciting challenge: Consolidating the work of 8 agencies that provide digital forensic services to the whole county into a task force model.

For the task force model to become a reality, the lab needed a central case management system to streamline the operations of the busy lab that handled hundreds of devices from multiple jurisdictions.

“We’re on track to handle over 600 devices this year. That’s a lot of evidence, cases, and reports to keep track of without a central case management system,” Jeff says.

Before Monolith Forensics, Jeff and his team were using an Excel spreadsheet to track all the cases that they worked on. However, the spreadsheet was massive and cumbersome because of the large volume of evidence.

Managing evidence analysis requests was difficult as the lab didn't have a joint application form. Examiners would receive investigation requests via email which created massive email chains that wasted the team’s time.

Jeff explains, “If you take one dialogue that’s a six-email string and compound it to 500 cases a year, that’s a crazy amount of communication.”

This back-and-forth created confusion and there was no way to verify if crucial case information - such as when the lab had taken custody of a device- had been entered into the tracking spreadsheet. Jeff says that maintaining chain of custody can “make or break a case.”
Plus, lab supervisors didn’t have visibility into the cases that examiners were working on, making it difficult to prioritize the cases and devices that the lab could take on.

Retrieving evidence was a hassle as Jeff and his team had to scroll through thousands of rows on the spreadsheet to find out the physical location of a piece of evidence. Sometimes, the information was not accurate.

Jeff knew that it was time to streamline case management and find software that would centralize the lab’s operations and simplify the process of reporting lab statistics to the board of directors. He quickly found that Monolith Forensics was the best choice.

“We’re on track to handle over 600 devices this year. That’s a lot of evidence, cases, and reports to keep track of without a central case management system.”
Solution

Stress-free migration

With hundreds of high-priority cases requiring their attention, Boulder County's digital examiners didn't have time for lengthy onboarding processes and customizations. The team at Monolith handled the migration and answered the examiners’ questions on how to use the software.

“We sent our spreadsheet to the Monolith team and they imported all the data for us. The time commitment and frustration of getting started wasn’t there because they took care of everything,” Jeff says.

When the lab transitioned from on-premise to cloud storage, the Monolith team facilitated the transition and allayed the hesitations that Jeff and his team had.

Centralized inquiry system

Monolith’s inquiry system has streamlined and centralized Boulder County Digital Forensics Lab’s case intake process. Long email chains are a thing of the past because all requests have to come in through one form.

“Monolith’s inquiry system is a huge time saver for us because we ask requesters to enter all the case information upfront. It collects information such as what they want done, their search authority, their turnaround time, and case synopsis,” he explains.

Increased caseload visibility and control

Total visibility into case information has eased case intake management and given Jeff and his team the power to control the cases and evidence that they take up.

“If a requester wants to submit three computers and a phone, we can look at the request and say, ‘just send one computer, for now, if we need more devices later, we’ll ask.’ This gives us more control and it’s the best way to do it,” Jeff explains.
Solid chain of custody

It’s impossible for Jeff and his team to break chain of custody because all the details pertaining to a case are entered into Monolith before evidence gets to the lab.

“When evidence gets to the lab, we print a barcode, scan it, and all of the information is logged in Monolith. We can report out chain of custody information from the software,” Jeff says.

Accurate evidence tracking

Thanks to Monolith, evidence retrieval and release is a simple process. “We scan the barcode and the evidence is marked as released. The date and time are stamped and the recipient is automatically recorded in Monolith,” says Jeff.

Consistent data structure

Monolith’s pre-built forms allow Jeff to control how his team inputs data which simplifies data retrieval. Before, there was no clarity on the naming convention of case numbers which created confusion.

“The data output of Excel spreadsheets is reliant on user input. With Monolith, we have a required format so we always know how to find cases,” Jeff says.

Exceptional support

Jeff and his team are impressed by the expertise and responsiveness of the Monolith team. They are always ready to solve problems and provide guidance.

“The Monolith team is exceptional, when we reach out to them with a problem or need, they fix our problems immediately and update the software the same day. We’ve never had an unanswered call or email,” he says.
“Monolith’s inquiry system is a huge time saver for us because we ask requesters to enter all the case information upfront. It collects information such as what they want done, their search authority, their turnaround time, and case synopsis.”

Results
99% decrease in the time it takes to pull data

Adopting Monolith Forensics has enabled Boulder County Digital Forensics Lab to funnel all its cases into one pipeline and streamline lab operations. This saves Jeff and his team a lot of time because they don’t have to scroll through a massive spreadsheet to find information.

“There’s no comparison between Monolith and an Excel spreadsheet. If there’s a piece of evidence sitting on my desk and I scan the barcode, all the case information pops up. That’s a huge time-saver,” Jeff says.

Today, the data at Boulder County Digital Forensics Lab is clean and organized, thanks to Monolith. It has made it easy for Jeff to pull statistics that justify departmental expenditures to the board of directors.

“Before, it would take me 8 -10 hours to clean up data and create graphs and reports for the yearly board meeting. Today, it takes minutes. Monolith does it all for me and makes data reporting efficient,” he says.
“We have viewer accounts in Monolith so that other agency supervisors can log in from their police departments offsite and pull up the statistics that they want to see,” Jeff concludes.

“Before, it would take me 8-10 hours to clean up data and create graphs and reports for the yearly board meeting. Today, it takes minutes, Monolith does it all for me and makes data reporting efficient.”

Since Monolith runs on the cloud, agency supervisors in different jurisdictions have remote access to lab data for oversight purposes.
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