FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED: SIGNAL SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING TOOL PROVIDES VITAL “EYES AND EARS” IN THE INTERESTS OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND CRIME PREVENTION.

THE SITUATION
When it comes to effective policing, accurate, timely information and communication is critical. And when it comes to the way in which people communicate, social media is increasingly the tool of choice for myriad everyday interactions. Recognising the ubiquity of social media and the sheer weight of potentially invaluable information it brings to light, the New Zealand Police looked to find a tool to help harness the power of social media, giving the ability to monitor, filter and build profiles from real-time information in a way that – prior to the advent of social media – was hitherto unthinkable.

Senior Sergeant Neil Macrae says: “We needed to get a greater understanding of what was going on, utilising publicly available information to accurately predict when and where crime and disorder will happen, and then taking this intelligence to enforcement managers and those in the field. We needed access to real-time information and the ability to empower people in the field with timely on-the-ground intelligence.”

New Zealand Police engaged Intergen to develop a powerful and yet easy-to-use social media monitoring tool that would cast a net across a whole new world of user-generated public information online. The result: Signal. “Signal is a solution that facilitates monitoring not only for crisis management and crime fighting, but also crime prevention, assisting in the smooth running of large scale public events, gauging the mood of our communities and giving us the ability to complement our day to day policing priorities in a very targeted way while ensuring we maintain adherence to the Policing Act,” says Neil.

THE PAIN
When it came to the pain points, “it was more a case of what we didn’t know,” Neil says. “Social media and public information was a great untapped resource for us. It’s unverified, but if you get a group of people talking about the same event at the same location at the same time, it adds weight to the intelligence picture. And Signal gives us the ability to quickly and easily frame this picture, and to filter and drill down into it,” he adds.

Queensland Police set a strong precedent in showing how social media could be powerfully leveraged in times of crisis. When the floods of December 2010 and January 2011 hit, necessity proved to be the mother of invention: with so little time and so much information available, Queensland Police embraced social media and engaged directly with the public. In the midst of widespread
devastation, social media provided a timely emergency management vehicle for two-way communication.

With so much information out there – for example an estimated half a million tweets per minute alone, one of the challenges in monitoring social media is finding the proverbial needle in the haystack, and doing it quickly.

“This kind of monitoring can be done with existing tools,” explains Steve Milligan, Signal’s Service Line Lead, Public Safety and Emergency Management. “Signal will only scan publically available social media networks. The problem is the sheer volume of this information, the complexity of drilling down into exactly the information you need, and the time it takes to do this. With Signal in place it is a straightforward, easy to manage process. Signal handles multiple feeds, multiple filters and multiple locations all in one tool, and as many concurrent searches as required. It also will archive anything you’ve searched on, so that specific information can be drawn upon at a later date – functionality that will become increasingly important as social media-based evidence finds a growing place in a court of law.”

SIGNAL IN ACTION

You only have to look to the news headlines to see how potent a tool social media has become in galvanising public sentiment and activity, for good and bad. Signal has become a key tool – for good – in New Zealand Police’s arsenal, and has been used successfully in numerous situations, from emergency response and crime fighting to large scale events.

Signal was used throughout the 2011 Rugby World Cup, helping to ensure the smooth running of the event, including mitigating infrastructure and transport failures and is regularly used to monitor events such as the Royal Tour and other public events. Signal also frequently proves its worth in unforeseen day-to-day incidents, like being the first to discover a plane in distress via passenger tweets and intervening in planned unauthorised drag racing meets by sending uniform cars to the scene.

Further away from home, New Zealand Police has used the tool to monitor the London Riots and the London Olympics.

THE BUSINESS CASE

New Zealand Police needed a tool to better understand and incorporate social media information, deriving real-time intelligence and situational awareness to manage large scale events and mitigate and prevent community incidents, empowering enforcement managers and in-the-field staff.

THE BUSINESS VALUE

» Provides the ability to respond to and anticipate criminal activity, identify locations, gather evidence, understand networks, identify persons of interest and build criminal profiles

» In incidents and events, gives ability to identify the nature and location of the event, the people and communities in need, gain increased understanding of impact and any gaps in response

» In emergency management situations, provides tools to identify and correct misinformation, monitor preparedness, horizon scan for reported events, improve community relations and monitor online discussions

ABOUT SIGNAL

Signal is a social media monitoring and management solution designed for public safety and emergency management. Signal helps to monitor and visualise communications over a range of social media channels, enabling organisations to make social media a part of their wider intelligence gathering requirements. Signal is available now from:

www.getsignal.info

www.intergen.co.nz/signal

© Copyright 2012 Intergen Limited. All rights reserved. This document is for informational purposes only. No warranties, express or implied, are made in this document. Information may change without notice. The names of companies and products mentioned herein may be the trademarks of their respective owners.