



MARION COUNTY

SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Florida Crime Prevention Association,

Thank you for taking the time to consider our submission for crime prevention program of the year. The program that we developed and implemented here has already been proven effective for the Marion County Sheriff's Office and I hope that other agencies can adopt a similar program for their agencies.

The name of our program is B-SAFE. Business Sheriff Alert For Emergencies. This program began as an initiative by our Sheriff, Chris Blair, to coordinate with our local business owners and provide up-to-date crime information via email in an effort to educate them as to crimes that may affect their specific type of business/industry. Most business owners recognized that they would only find out about crime that had occurred to a similar business in the news maybe the following day or maybe never hear about it at all.

That was the initial concept, but we realized that most people will not check their email very often. The crime information, in some instances, may be such that it needed immediate attention. So, we designed a final product that utilizes text messages instead of email alerts as most people are more likely to check a text message. The issue with sending out a large group text to, say for instance, all convenience stores in the county, is that some phones block group texts and a lot of business owners did not want their number available to everyone else in the group text. We soon found a more streamlined method to do this.

We saw how that most large, retail stores and chain restaurants have a way for a customer to text a message to them and the customer would be signed up for a coupon text list. Example: Best Buy allows you to text the word "deals" to 332211 and you will be updated as to any specials or sales that they wish to make you aware of. This eliminates the "group text" issues and has simple "unsubscribe" capabilities. We were able to contract with a local company, 'Digital Savvy' that has successfully provided this service on a national level.

How it works: we have set up 20 categories of businesses (convenience stores, banks, restaurants, construction companies, hotel/motel etc.) A convenience store can text the word "convenience" to our number and they are now signed up. If we have a robbery at one store, our deputy or detective on the scene can send out a text to all other convenience stores and can even include photos of the criminal and maybe even his vehicle and any information that we have. This allows for any nearby convenience stores that may become potential victims to be alerted in a very timely manner and assist us in locating the criminal. Businesses that are not affected by this crime are not alerted thereby reducing the tendency to "dismiss" the alert. Similarly for construction site theft, we can immediately notify other

Chris Blair, Sheriff



MARION COUNTY

SHERIFF'S OFFICE

construction companies of a theft so that they can take measures to protect their sites. In addition to that, deputies and officers can sign up and receive this information as well. Sometimes deputies or officers in neighboring zones or agencies may not receive this information via radio and it serves as another means of giving the officer as much information as possible. Included in the list of business is also a "Fleet Watch" category. This is for any business or government entity that has a fleet of vehicles out on the roadways and may be able to assist us as extra "eyes and ears". Each individual driver can sign on and join B-SAFE. This can be especially effective for Silver/Amber alerts as well as general crimes where a vehicle may be involved that law enforcement is looking for allowing a broader search area to be covered and not alerting the criminal by a nearby marked patrol car.

Implementation: This program began in December of 2015.

Targeted crime problem: This is a broad program targeting all crimes but specifically crimes to commercial businesses (robbery, theft etc.) with the ability to "pinpoint" potential victim businesses.

Effectiveness: Initially, around 500 businesses signed up and that number grows by at least a dozen every week. The feedback from the business community has been nothing but positive. How many crimes has this prevented? No one knows but, the crime rate overall in Marion County has been reduced by over 10%. This has also created new working relationships with local business owners and has made them feel more "involved" with making their county safer. Many businesses have come forward offering their services in charities and other areas that the Sheriff's Office is actively involved in. The "side effect", has been a great public relations tool to allow businesses to see that law enforcement is trying to come alongside them and assist them in working and living more safely in their neighborhoods.

Community group targeted by the program: This is a program designed specifically for commercial businesses as well as churches.

Thank you again for considering our program for this award!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Bloom".

Deputy Sheriff Paul Bloom
Florida Crime Prevention Practitioner
Marion County Sheriff's Office

Chris Blair, Sheriff