Fort Wayne Police Department

Use Case provided by Wickr
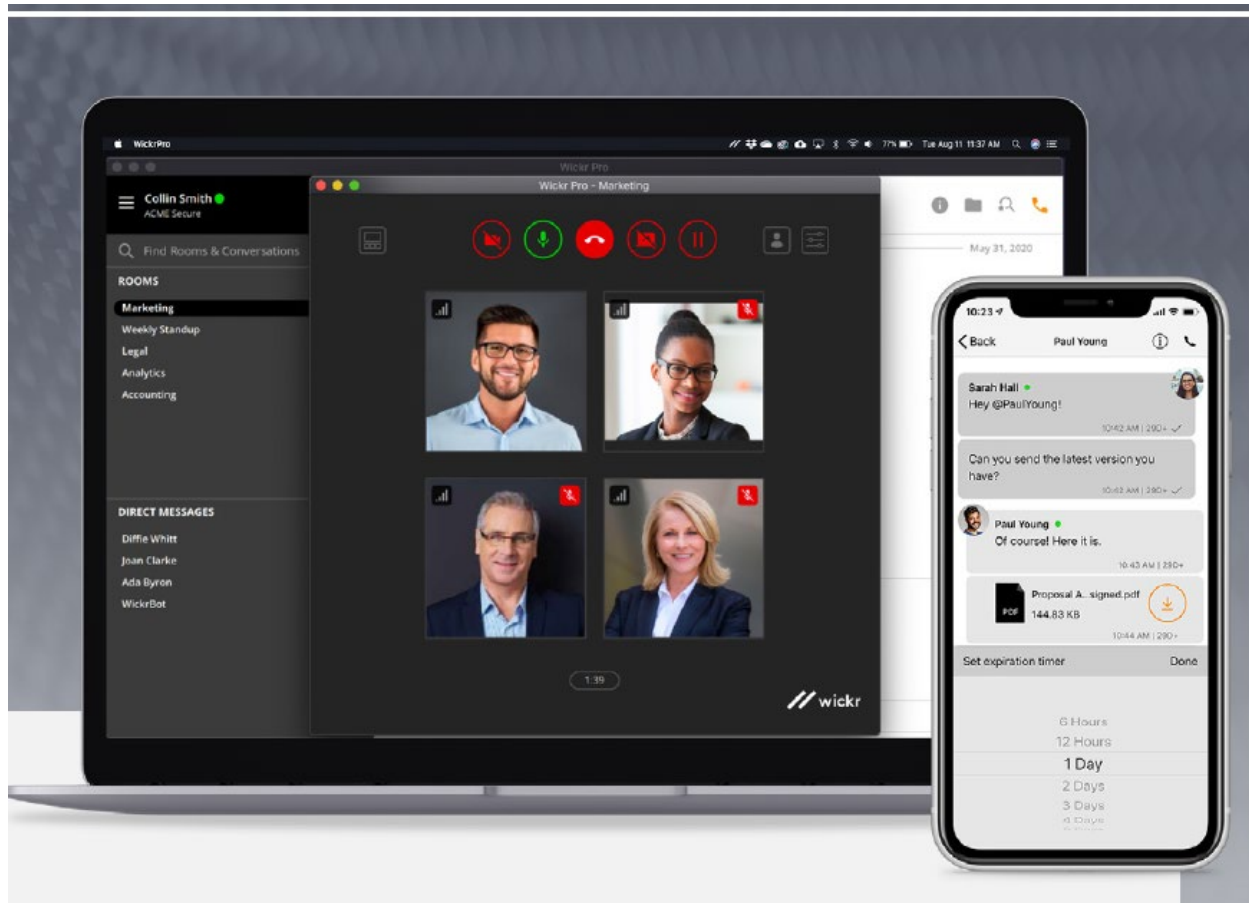
About Lieutenant J. Bowers

I've been a law enforcement officer for 30 years, starting my career as both a university and small-town metro area officer for three years before spending the last 26 years at the Fort Wayne Police Department (FWPD) — nearly 500 sworn staff serving a population of over 250,000.

During my FWPD career, I've spent many years as a member or commander of many small units — hostage negotiations, sUAS, fugitive teams, narcotics units, and task force efforts with local federal partners, primarily the FBI, DEA, and USMS. Most recently, that has included a collaborative task force effort between narcotics, gang, and homicide units in a more proactive approach to investigating homicides that has increased clearance rates significantly.

As a supervisor in these roles for the last decade, I have overseen the planning and execution of hundreds of operations — from the small-unit controlled drug buy to the multi-agency "roundup" service of dozens of arrest and search warrants.

> *First rule of planning and execution — without comms, you have nothing. And if your comms plan is broken, it is one of the first things to fix.*

Use of Wickr in the FWPD

Recently, one of my colleagues on our department's SWAT team referred me to a news article about Wickr's capabilities for the warfighter. He has deployed several times overseas and mentioned that many of his military friends have relied on Wickr in the field.

Our first use case was the simple controlled drug buy or fugitive surveillance operation. These all require operations plans, and usually, several buys are involved in a case. Establishing a "room" for a case involving several buys allows for easy noting of events during the buy, convenient storage of ops plans, and robust handling of surveillance photo and video attachments that often bog down traditional SMS/MMS methods. Combine that with the ability to live share locations, the ability for analysts in the office and uniformed detectives in a squad car to interact on Windows and not just on phones, and the robust search feature leveraged against previous surveillance comments (even across multiple rooms!), and Wickr quickly excels as the comms platform we've never had for this use. Adding to this, the easy scalability available to supplemental personnel from other agencies with Global Federation has only increased the value of Wickr. Wickr bots for managing longer-term human assets is another capability with strong potential.

Coordinating real-time situational awareness and target acquisition between the field and the operations center (me) and then relaying that quickly to those responding teams has been hugely augmented by Wickr. Group calling in Presentation mode has allowed live screen sharing of annotated overhead maps or live drone video to everybody in a mission room while utilizing our regular LMR comms for simplicity in the field.

Benefits of Wickr

We are just beginning to utilize Wickr on critical incident responses generated from patrol operations where tactical crisis negotiations and drone teams respond to high-risk barricade or hostage situations. As the negotiations team commander, Wickr has great potential.

First, Wickr allows us our negotiations team to stream live command post drone video and audio negotiations securely within the command post to those not in command vehicles utilizing our traditional wireline hookups, e.g., a negotiator listening with an earpiece remotely to negotiations while interacting with family. Wickr also allows streaming of the same to upper command not on the scene should they desire to do so. On rare occasions, Wickr could allow real-time, secure streaming of negotiations to FBI CNU personnel for consultation purposes. For my colleagues on regional or state police negotiation teams where response time is lengthy, Wickr could allow for better collaboration during the response and the live streaming described above if needed.

Second, while our drone team uses an industry-leading sUAS [4] flight platform to conduct field operations (DroneSense), it is not always practical to create individual users on yet another platform for their situational awareness, especially for users outside our agency. Wickr handles this heavy lifting easily, requiring only that the user create a Wickr account and be added to a mission room via federation with screen sharing to accomplish the task — with security and minimal latency.

Third, during these critical incidents, Wickr allows the same screen sharing of negotiations and live drone video to tactical officers in forward positions using phones — not previously attainable in any efficient and secure way.

Most recently, we've begun creating a room for a homicide soon after the event occurs, using the room to track the progress of the homicide investigation not only among the homicide detectives but also adding the other task force units (narcotics, gang, federal) to the room so that fast-developing intel across multiple shifts and rotation can move the case ahead and give everyone awareness on how the case is developing, instead of just creating a room when it's time for the manhunt. As a supervisor looking at multiple rooms and missions, using rooms in this way helps keep track of many missions easily (especially with the global search function).

Want to learn how Wickr can help your department? Contact us to learn more.
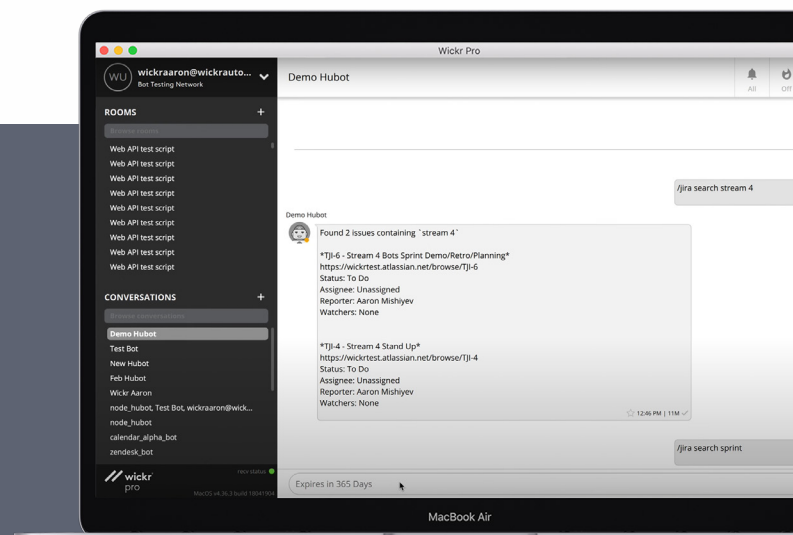
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