



## Government Initiatives Create VAR Opportunities

▲ When government funding becomes available for community technology initiatives, channel companies with fitting solutions will profit.

by Matt Pillar

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, commonly referred to as the "crime bill," authorized more than \$30 billion in federal spending to help municipalities fight crime. Of that total, Title XXI of the bill allocated \$40 million to improve "police technical automation," which includes the improvement of mobile digital terminals and communication and dispatch systems, the automation of fingerprint ID systems, and the computerization of criminal history records. For Kathy Pakkebie, President Bill Clinton's signature on the bill was an autographed ticket to opportunity. Pakkebie is president of Portable Computer Systems (PCS) (Littleton, CO), a mobile computing hardware VAR that specializes in law enforcement installations.

### Selling A Reputation

Founded in 1993, PCS entertains such large clients as the Denver, Lakewood, and Jefferson County police departments in Colorado and the St. Louis and Tucson police departments in Missouri and Arizona. The company sells hardware and integration services only, and deals exclusively with Panasonic's (Secaucus, NJ) ToughBook line of ruggedized laptops.

At a trade show in 1999, Pakkebie met with representatives from the Colorado State Patrol (CSP) who had just spent a portion of their crime bill grant money on a software program for incident reporting. The CSP was looking for hardware to support its new software investment. PCS won the \$3 million account based on its experience equipping other large police forces with mobile computing hardware. In a three-

phase effort that was recently completed, PCS outfitted 370 CSP vehicles with ToughBooks using Gamber-Johnson (Stevens Point, WI) mounting hardware, L&E (Conshohocken, PA) docking stations, and Sierra

Wireless (Richmond, British Columbia) data modems. For every installation it performs, PCS gets a 10% to 15% margin over the cost of the hardware installed.

The Panasonic ToughBooks installed by PCS are wireless-ready and feature antireflective LCD screens with touch input. These features allow law enforcement officials to operate the notebook from both inside and outside the patrol car. Prior to the mobile computing project, most CSP officers were accessing the National Crime Information Computer (NCIC), a nationwide crime information clearinghouse, by contacting a dispatcher via RF (radio frequency) communication. The officer would give the dispatcher information, such as a license plate number, and the dispatcher would run the query through the NCIC via the station's Internet connection. With the introduction of the wireless

mobile computing installation, officers can bypass the dispatcher and access information from the NCIC and other databases directly from the patrol car. Additionally, the computer expedites the infamous paperwork police officers have to complete. Paperless accident and incident reports are automated and filed electronically. Officers can even communicate with each other while on the beat via Internet-enabled e-mail and chat programs like ICQ (I seek you).



Portable Computer Systems installs mobile workstations in such unique quarters as Chevrolet Camaros and the Ford Crown Victoria seen above. Officers also have the freedom to roam from the car with their notebooks (below).



### Challenging Installation Environments

The installations PCS completes for law enforcement clients take place in vehicles ranging from Ford Crown Victoria police cruisers to speedy Chevrolet Camaros and go-anywhere Jeep Cherokees. The variance in the type of vehicle being equipped and its intended use provides some unique installation challenges. "Vibration, heat, and bumping kill hard drives," Pakkebiec says. "But these units have to stay in the car and perform whether the car is on a bumpy, high-speed chase or sitting in hot sunlight." Docking and mounting hardware must be rock-solid, yet vibration-dampening. Pakkebiec is quick to point out the challenge of space limitations as well. Camaros are a real challenge; there's just not a lot of room in there, she says. Custom mounting hardware is required for each of the different car models PCS equips.

Users must be able to disconnect their computers rapidly, so PCS uses in-vehicle connectors with easy removal features. A quick-release lever allows the unit to be rapidly detached from the docking station.

### The Trouble With Training

Overcoming the objections of a street-hardened veteran cop can be a challenge. Pakkebiec concedes that training older officers is harder than training newer ones. "The younger guys are more computer savvy in the first place and not so stuck in their ways," she says.

PCS' extensive training effort goes beyond post-installation training of end users. The company also offers training classes to the IT staffs of police departments who want to conduct their own installations.

With so many mobile workstations in constant service, the VAR maintains an almost daily contact relationship with the CSP. "We continue to retrofit cars and reimage software," Pakkebiec says. Believe

it or not, we even have to replace stolen units from time to time." Stolen computers from police cars? Between the funding and the service contract, you might say criminals are keeping companies like PCS in business. □

For More Info. On Panasonic's ToughBook

Go To [www.panasonic.com/computer/notebook](http://www.panasonic.com/computer/notebook)

