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CASE STUDY: BALTIMORE COUNTY PD

Baltimore County Police Department and Geofeedia Partner to Protect the Public During Freddie Gray Riots

BACKGROUND

When Freddie Gray passed away in Baltimore on April 25, 2015 from injuries allegedly sustained during his arrest by the City of Baltimore Police, Detective Sergeant Andrew Vaccaro with the Baltimore County Police Department's Criminal Intelligence Unit knew trouble was brewing. With Ferguson's Michael Brown still fresh in the nation's mind and racial tensions running high, Baltimore braced itself for the imminent and expected protests.

OPPORTUNITY

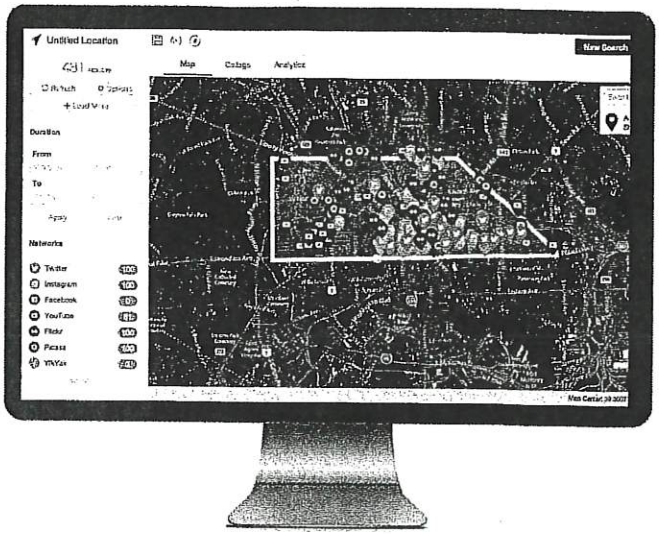
"The Freddie Gray incident was a watershed moment for the City of Baltimore police," Vaccaro said. "The minute his death was announced, we knew we needed to monitor social media data at key locations where protesting was likely, especially at the local police precinct where Gray had been arrested."

In a stroke of luck, the Baltimore County Police Department had renewed their Geofeedia contract a week before the trouble began. The Criminal Intelligence Unit had experienced the tool's power first-hand before, and they didn't hesitate to call in reinforcements when trouble arose.

When an event at Camden Yards on April 25 turned violent, a ten-night long police nightmare was set into motion. It was the Criminal Intelligence Unit's job to help protect the officers responding to the protests. Vaccaro and his team needed backup — and fast.

SOLUTION

When the ensuing riots hit the news, Geofeedia Enablement Specialist Carly Tschantz immediately checked Baltimore social media activity and reached out to Vaccaro. He and his team were already en route to the protests, so Tschantz volunteered to draw



perimeters around key locations, set up automated alerts, and forward real-time information directly to Vaccaro's team via email and text. Shortly thereafter, an Emergency Operations Center and Intelligence Command Post was established so social stream information could flow directly from to the commander in charge via 8 giant, in-office TV screens.

Vaccaro's team remained in constant contact with the police department and key city contacts, updating them with real-time photos and social media information that could affect the safety of their officers and the public at large.

"We can no longer rely on the media to understand what's really happening on the ground. There is always a bias that comes into play. With Geofeedia updates, I know exactly what's happening, and I can help keep our officers safe and well-informed."

—Sergeant Andrew Vaccaro, Baltimore County Police Department Detective, Criminal Intelligence Unit

"With Geofeedia, I knew exactly what was happening on the ground in key locations, and could use that data to help keep officers safe and informed," said Vaccaro.

For example, when a group of rioters began targeting police vehicles and posting photos of burning police cruisers on social media, Vaccaro alerted the responding officers. They arrived in a larger group by bus instead of individually in their cars. "Geofeedia helped us protect our people and make better decisions," said Vaccaro.

As the riots escalated, the Geofeedia team continued monitoring social activity from key locations and raising potential issues. When, they noticed increased chatter from a local high school about kids who planned to walk out of class and use mass transit to head to the Mondawmin Mall protest, they alerted Vaccaro immediately.

"We were able to turn around and alert local police, who intercepted the kids – some of whom had already hijacked a metro bus – and found their backpacks full of rocks, bottles, and fence posts," recalls Vaccaro. "They planned to do a lot of damage."

RESULTS

The unrest lasted for ten long nights. By May 2, Baltimore had brought in more than 5,000 officers in place to combat the violent protests.

Using Geofeedia's real-time, location-based social media monitoring, Vaccaro's team was able to heighten officers' situational awareness and help them stay one step ahead of the rioters. In some cases, police officers were even able to run social media photos through facial recognition technology to discover rioters with outstanding warrants and arrest them directly from the crowd.

"Every person we got off the street before they hurt someone was a win," Vaccaro said. "Our officers were on the streets day-in, day-out protecting the lives and property of Baltimore citizens, and they needed all the help they could get."

In the end, peace was restored and the violence over Gray's death was gradually extinguished. "We could not have responded this well without Geofeedia," Vaccaro said. "It allowed us to join the social media conversation where and when it mattered most."

FUTURE PLANS

Even though the Baltimore riots are over, there is still much work to be done to repair police/citizen relations and ensure future conflicts are resolved peacefully. "We plan to use the social media archive data from Geofeedia to prosecute as many law breakers from the riots as we can," Vaccaro says. "But, we're even more focused on using social media to forge deeper, more positive relationships between the police and the citizens they protect and serve." How?

"The possibilities with Geofeedia are limitless" said Vaccaro. "From school threats to active shooters to hostage situations, location-based social media gives us insights like never before." After all, public safety depends on fast, accurate information. And that's what Geofeedia does best.

ABOUT GEOFEEDIA

Geofeedia provides social media search and discovery by location. Our patented technology searches Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Flickr, Picasa, and Viddy data by location to provide users with real-time insights from anywhere in the world.

Learn more at: geofeedia.com

ABOUT THE BALTIMORE COUNTY PD

The Baltimore County Police Department enforces the laws and ordinances of the state and county, safeguards life and property, prevents and detects crime, preserves the peace, and protects the rights of all citizens.

Learn more at: baltimorecountymd.gov