

Overview

The Ventura County Sheriff's Office long ago realized the residents of the County of Ventura were being victimized all too often by fraudsters and scam artists.

Challenge

Victims, especially the elderly and underserved minority populations of Ventura County, are often the targets of fraud and scams. Suspects, often times from overseas, prey upon this population through a variety of confidence games, deceptive practices, and outright identity takeovers. Many of the victims are unwilling to approach law enforcement for assistance due to embarrassment or fear of the police due to immigration issues.

Solution

Personnel from the Ventura County Sheriff's Office approached this challenge through a three- pronged solution involving education, investigation, and collaboration. 1) Education – Each of the six Sheriff's stations has a dedicated fraud hotline where community members can call and receive information about current scams affecting each jurisdiction or they can speak to an investigator about a scam they encountered. When a new scam arises affecting any population, but especially the elderly or Spanish speaking communities, officers go to Senior Citizen center groups and housing complexes, or to Spanish speaking outreach community groups to leverage their assistance in getting the word out about current crimes and also about reporting and prevention. Investigators have also utilized other methods of communication such as flyers, social media, and press releases to ensure all residents of Ventura County are educated and armed with information to protect themselves. 2) Investigation – Detectives from the Sheriff's Office have worked both domestic and international cases involving large monetary losses at all six Sheriff's Stations. One example of this is the Moorpark Police Station where the fraud investigator has recovered annually for the past decade on average one million dollars in stolen funds. Detectives use cutting edge analytics and investigative methods to track and return stolen assets. 3) Collaboration – Ventura County Sheriff's Personnel routinely visit and form relationships with all check cashing and money wiring establishments, banks, and locations that sell gift cards which are typically used in many of the most recent scams. Personnel instruct employees at these locations on what to look for and how to stop fraud before it occurs. On many occasions banks have called our detectives to advise them they

stopped elderly subjects from wiring their life savings to a foreign location because of the information they received from our agency. Our detectives have also formed strong partnerships with their federal partners and work collaboratively to stop crime and bring criminals to justice.

Innovation

Law enforcement is typically reactive in nature. That is to say, deputies and officers usually respond to a call to investigate a crime after it has occurred. The approach detailed above is 1/3 reactive and 2/3 proactive. The Ventura County Sheriff's Office recognizes we as a profession are much more effective when we can work upstream and stop crimes before they occur. By educating and collaborating we feel we have made an impressive dent in victimization. For those cases that slip through the net of prevention, our personnel are extremely savvy and well trained in the investigate process.

Results

Through our collective efforts as an agency we have increased our social media following into the hundreds of thousands. We continually conduct outreach and trainings to all populations, specifically targeting the most at-risk and underserved. Our agency has stopped millions of dollars from being lost to fraudsters and scam artists due to the diligent and innovative efforts of our employees. Many of our staff are invited to speak on a national forum about these efforts.

Replicability

The innovative and collaborative approach by our agency can certainly be replicated by other entities. As mentioned above, our officers routinely advise, council, and train investigators from other jurisdictions.

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