



Orange County Sheriff Modernizes Towing, Stops Waste and Overcharging

Impound and Fleet Tows Now Trackable in One System

In 2017 the Orange County Sheriff's Office (Florida) needed to address:



No auditable trail for vehicles



Citizens and county being unfairly overcharged



PSAPs swamped with towing inquiries



Too much physical paperwork

BACKGROUND

Busy Department Looks for Simpler Ways to Manage Towing

1.4 million people across more than 1,000 square miles in Orange County, Florida (with Orlando at its center) rely on the Orange County Sheriff's Office. In 2017, the OCSO was responsible for crime, impound and fleet tows – and associated record-keeping and admin support – from three contracted towing companies (and three lots) across the county.

Citizen-facing touchpoints often relied on in-person forms. In 2017, internal cross-department discussions about a better way to track towing activity resulted in initial research into solutions and partners.

CHALLENGE

An Acute Need to Update Impound Tracking

Because of personnel changes and lack of insight into how many cars were being held, there was no auditable trail for records. Vehicles held for evidentiary reasons would sometimes fall through the cracks, and duplicate bills for long holds confused police administrative staff and frustrated citizens. The agency reviewed multiple tows and determined that some vehicles had been sitting in impound lots for periods ranging from one year to over 10 years.

Difficulties related to inconsistencies in customer charges, customer service responsiveness and compliance with contractual obligations resulted in dissatisfaction with the administration and tracking of the OCSO tow operations.

With 3,000 officer-initiated tows a year, it was widely agreed that more accurate impound tracking and billing was overdue.

“Now we can make more informed decisions about safety and response time metrics. Citizen complaints have plummeted along with administrative call volume to our PSAP staff.”

— JOHN FARRELL

Accreditation Manager
Orange County Sheriff's Office, Florida



SOLUTION

An OCSO Major spearheaded the search for alternatives and identified AutoReturn as a solution. Detectives, forensics, fiscal/legal personnel and accreditation all aligned during the process and settled on AutoReturn as the best option. AutoReturn came online in phases beginning in late 2021.

Now job one could be undertaken: Audit all the lots and get every vehicle entered into the AutoReturn platform. The audit allowed OCSO to account for every vehicle and initiate a “housecleaning” operation to clear the lots.

Deputies began using the mobile app to summon wreckers, and citizens were referred to a web portal to locate their vehicles. And because of the volume of fleet tows, single-source tracking helped the Agency identify inefficiencies in its operations.

RESULTS

Overnight Accountability and Reduced Administrative Pain

OCSO's initiative resulted in a vendor shakeup: With better auditing, they could quickly identify billing issues, while citizens no longer had to drive across the county to file forms at an office.

The Office of Accreditation also tracked the reduced burden of incoming calls to the communication's center inquiring about vehicles: 3,700 hours — or the equivalent of two full-time positions — were saved, freeing center staff to field more urgent calls.

With handwritten paper logs and forms being eliminated and details logged in the AutoReturn platform, processes got easier — from wrecker tows to logging crime-scene vehicle contents to helping citizens find their cars and finally settling the bills fairly when recovering their vehicles.

Join the many other cities, counties and states across the globe to create safer, transparent and more efficient communities.

ORANGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

CHALLENGES

- No auditable vehicle records for 3K tows/year
- Billing and customer service issues across system

SOLUTION

- Audit every car across all lots
- Train and align all county staff on one system

RESULTS

- Eliminate billing inconsistencies for citizens
- Massively reduce call volume in PSAP



ABOUT

When AutoReturn began 20 years ago, police towing too often left tow operators, law enforcement and vehicle owners underserved and unhappy. We saw a better way.

We saw an opportunity to fix common towing operation problems nationwide—long wait times, vehicle damage, property loss, low accountability and conflicts of interest—and we knew we had to take it. So we built the first system combining top-notch technology with deep industry expertise and hands-on help.

AutoReturn launched in one city and now operates in more than 30 cities, counties and states. But while we're proud of our growth in numbers, what brings us the most satisfaction is knowing that we've helped transform police towing in every community where we operate.