The Future of Technology Partners for Public Safety: A Case Study on First Due

When the fire service leaders look to acquire and adopt new technologies, we need to ensure we lead through the technology we implement – not be led by it. This concept is something I have witnessed again and again as fire agencies implement new technology integration into operations – we all want to have the "shiny new toy," and we buy it impulsively.

I've been lucky over the last few years to spend a lot of time with emerging fire service technology through partnerships with Esri, TEEX, the IAFC, and the California Fire Chiefs Association. These partnerships have led to national presentations on technology integration and to consulting with agencies as they build technology integration plans. If you do not have a technology integration plan, you should; technology deserves strategic implementation! (But that is a different article.)

The fire service technology vendors that we need to partner with to achieve this, should be thought leaders and innovators in technology. Sadly, the prevailing philosophies often fail to deliver a path to utilize their platforms in a way that continually adds value to our operations. To most effectively analyze why this problem exists, we need to look at the two current types of vendors in our space:

1. **Incumbent Software Vendors** who are focused on compliance and the "do it only because you have to" mentality. Many vendors in this space do not actively listen to our true problems in the field and are built on legacy technology architectures and business models that do not align with the current and future needs of modern public safety agency. As our demands grow and change, these vendors across CAD, RMS, and Mobile Response struggle to keep up with the pace of the industry. Consequently, we (fire service leaders) are often left being led by the systems we have in place.

2. **Newer Entrants** that excel in solving niche problems using cutting-edge technologies, but all too often fall into the "shiny new toy" category and simply do not fit holistically into our operations. As a result, these solutions often do not get used to their full potential, and their value is not realized. In short, these companies are focused on building features, but not providing us with platforms to manage core process end-to-end.

However, there is a third rapidly-emerging vendor that is becoming more prevalent in the world of public safety technology – one that is poised to deliver the answers to many of our most profound challenges. These emerging companies:

1. Are problem-focused
2. Provide a holistic solution that slips into pre-existing operational workflows
3. Build with modern technology
4. Are focused on customer success
5. Partner with other technology companies, the fire service, and the public

While reviewing technology with vendors, agencies, and other stakeholders on the IAFC Technology Council, I have had the opportunity to work closely with many of these types of emerging public safety technology companies that fit this criterion, including Intterra, Tablet Command, Esri, and with First Due. I want to use First Due as a case study in this model. (I am not associated with First Due, nor do I profit in any way from this article; this is just a great company to use as a case-study!)

First Due is a SaaS (Software as a Service) based platform reimagining pre-incident planning (pre-plans) and emergency response by ensuring agencies have the critical data they need on every structure (including commercial and residential occupancies) before, during, and after an incident.

By focusing on the categories listed above, let's dissect how First Due is partnering with the fire service and other public safety agencies.

Problem Focused: First Due focuses on solving problems, not merely building features that drive compliance. For instance, many of you would agree that pre-incident planning has always been a challenge for agencies across the country. But why? Simply put, we always have focused on meeting requirements and not solving the underlying problem. First Due sought to identify the core problem in three parts:

1. We do not have data on buildings we respond to every day – especially to the residential structures that represent the majority of our calls.

2. Collecting and maintaining data is difficult, time-consuming, and expensive.

3. Even when we do have information on our buildings, we rarely have that information available at the time we need it in a format we can use.

This ultimately leads to less effective decision-making in the field, resulting in increased risk to first responders and the communities they serve. To counter these problems, First Due has reimagined pre-incident planning, how we do it, and the role of technology in making that process easier. By taking a "problem-focused" approach and integrating data technology, the results are tremendous! Critical data is provided on every structure in a response area, *even residential*, and best yet- the system is integrated within existing fire service response workflows.

Provide a Holistic Solution: Even if we managed to solve a problem (or part of one) effectively, we could still fail to integrate it into our core operational workflows successfully. The result is an excellent idea with little benefit in the field – a problem that plagues many New Entrants.

First Due recognizes that tackling pre-incident planning from a compliance-driven, data collection focused perspective would not be effective in solving the problem. Pre-incident planning needs to be embedded in the preparation and response framework of an agency and tied directly to the way emergency response personnel think and behave in the field. Critical data is required at the time of response and needs to be consumed quickly and contextually.

This led First Due to not only integrate pre-incident planning effectively into the existing response that software agencies are using today, but also build their own mobile response solution. This strategy allows agencies using First Due to utilize a holistic pre-incident planning and mobile response platform rather than a piecemeal solution to a complex problem.

Build with Modern Technology: There are very obvious disadvantages that we have all experienced with the traditional software models of the past. On-premise (client-server based) solutions result in considerable up-front costs, higher long-term total cost of ownership, and restrictive versioning inhibiting our ability to adapt as your needs evolve. Ultimately, this creates a disconnect between the needs of your organization and that of the vendor. Simply "hosting" an on-premise version somewhere else (what many refer to as "fake cloud") doesn't solve any of these problems. Customers remain on different versions and do not receive the customer support, upgrades, maintenance, and partner integrations they need to continue to see value in

the solution as their workflows change over time with the shifting technological landscape. These disadvantages are magnified when agencies cannot access their own data.

First Due takes an "always on the latest version" true-cloud based approach focused on hosting, maintaining, and delivering the solution across all facets of the technology stack – meaning you and your IT staff do not need to. Even with cloud architecture, First Due still provides you with the configurability, integrations, and hands-on control that many enterprise on-premise platforms do, but without the version lock, functional vulnerabilities, and hardware restrictions. Finally, First Due allows agencies to truly "own" their data, providing them with the capability to extract, push, and pull information into other systems as required.

Focus on Customer Success: All the above successes boil down to one major point: Being a true technology partner (not just a vendor or a product).

A real partner focuses on the success of agencies using the platform, not only through onboarding but throughout the lifetime of use. Companies that focus on customer success build features and functionality that solve problems faced by these agencies every day, testing and integrating with them in the field with an eye to continual improvement. This means listening, and it means taking action. The traditional software model does not promote this type of solution building. Instead, it focuses on locking agencies in and not providing the continued support and partnership they deserve.

Conversely, First Due adopts a newer approach that involves listening carefully to customer feedback and building new features that help customers conquer their challenges. The subscription model First Due and other more modern software companies provide keeps them honest with regard to their deliverables and promotes constant value through use – year after year.

Partners with Other Technology Companies, the Fire Service, and the Public: The fire service is being inundated with common operational pictures (COPs). These COPs serve many different functions from agency, and interagency response, incident command system dashboards, and live information feeds for first responders, the public, and elected officials. Our firefighters work with the COPs each shift and rely on them to safely arrive on calls and to provide operational integration on emergency scenes. As emerging technology is introduced, vendors that work to integrate products together into a true Common Operating Platform are at a premium. All of us

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have experienced Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems not communicating with our neighbor's CAD system, our staffing software not populating our incident command operating systems, and our operational needs not being met at the same time by the multiple technologies that we are rapidly possessing. First Due's willingness to partner with other technology vendors to integrate its technology into existing operating systems is incredible and why they were highlighted in this article. COPs like Intterra and Tablet Command are used every day by many fire service agencies, and with a push of a button, their systems can be configured to show pre-plan data provided by First Due immediately.

Many data points in our communities are quickly being connected to public service operations. This Internet of Public Safety Things (IoPST) will allow the future fire service to provide for better community risk analysis and reduction and better, safer responses for our responders. The "community connect" feature in First Due allows the residents of the community to help build the pre-plans needed and provide critical occupancy data to the first responders at the time of response. This feature allows the community to partner with the fire service to focus on the pre-event, event, and post-event recovery in true community risk reduction fashion.

As technology evolves within the fire service and the broader public safety space, we need to review every technology decision through this framework. When choosing a technology partner, look for vendors that you can ultimately grow with and will grow with you. As the complexity of serving your community increases, so should the platforms you use to support your operations. Choose technology partners that focus on the problem, think about the solution holistically, deliver using cloud-based future-proof technologies, and concentrate on YOUR success, not just their processes.

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