



AIS™ Helps Improve Booking Accuracy at Sarasota County Jail

System automates 82 percent of incoming calls, freeing up staff members

SITUATION

The headline in the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* read, “Sarasota County Jail’s Errors Pile Up” and the investigative story detailed the booking mistakes leading to inmates being released too early or held too long. Although jail experts agreed that the number of errors were typical for a facility of its size, the negative publicity cast a shadow on the Sarasota Sheriff’s Department’s reputation and underscored the need to improve operations at the 1,100 bed facility.

While Sarasota County’s booking errors are not unusual, their candidness and transparency are practically unheard of. At most jails, booking errors are closely guarded secrets rarely discussed. But every Jail Administrator knows that they exist and just how challenging they are to address. After all, jails across the country are grappling with how to do more with less as budgets are slashed, yet ADP’s are remaining static, or in some cases, even rising. And for most facilities, this means increased strains on their booking departments.

The booking department at Sarasota County Jail was no exception. Booking clerks were expected to book, process and release upwards of 50 inmates per day, as well as simultaneously handling a non-stop barrage of phone calls. Most of the callers were looking for routine information such as inmate charges, bonding information, visitation hours, and directions to the facility. Jail front desk deputies were expected to deal with walk up traffic from visitors to the jail, process bail bonds, provide lobby security, investigate incidents occurring in the jail, as well as answer telephone calls. These calls proved to be a major distraction from more critical tasks.

According to Lt. Dario Valente, “It’s no secret that constant interruptions can cause errors. The jail front desk and booking department were always inundated with calls, making it a really stressful environment. The phones just kept ringing and ringing.”

SOLUTION

After “years of frustration,” Sarasota County found a cost-effective solution in AIS™, the nation’s most widely deployed voice response solution

2011 Statistics

Total Calls Handled Per Day	304
Total Calls Automated Per Day	249
Automation Rate	82%

for correctional facilities. With AIS™, all calls to the Sarasota County Jail are answered by the third ring, and callers can simply speak the name of an inmate or the type of facility information desired. A Spanish speaking option is also available and calls are answered 24-7. While citizens retrieve information quicker and easier than before, staff members are free to focus on other tasks with improved focus.

Since going live in April of 2011, AIS™ has handled over 81 percent of incoming calls, which provides the booking department timely relief and newfound ability to focus on critical tasks with fewer interruptions.

BENEFITS

“The booking errors and stressful working environment were the primary reason we decided to get AIS™,” said Valente. “And since its implementation, we’ve seen a *significant* decrease in the number of booking errors. We’re really happy with it and the work environment has definitely improved.”

While many facilities opt to address booking errors by simply “brushing them under the rug,” Sarasota County’s decision to face them head on resulted in benefits for citizens and the facility itself. Other facilities should take note of the accountability and openness at Sarasota County that led to identification of a solution and improved operations.

