

The logo for Condor, featuring the word "condor" in a lowercase, orange, sans-serif font. The letters have a slight shadow or gradient effect, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. The logo is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the page, with a large orange vertical bar to its left and a dark grey horizontal bar below it.

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The silver lining of COVID
for investigation teams

Condor by Distillery Software
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COVID-19 – the silver lining for investigation teams

It is no secret that investigative teams work best when teams are focused on where they add most value: in information gathering and analysis, and collaboration within and across teams. Best practice enables this by increasing automation and access to data, and decreasing time spent on administration. Over the last decade specialist systems have been developed to address these needs and support a best-practice approach to investigation management.

However, progress has been slow for two main reasons: the (perceived) complexity of implementing new systems and the difficulty of creating the shift in mind-set required for success.

Enter COVID-19

The pandemic provided the impetus for an accelerated rate of change - driven by necessity. Risks that were low or mitigated whilst investigation teams worked together in-person became unsustainably high once remote and hybrid working became the norm.

There was no longer a question of how or when to shift – only of how quickly the changes could be implemented.

Mitigating the risks of the 'new normal'

At Distillery Software, our focus is always on investigation teams. As our customers were adapting to the workplace challenges presented by enforced quarantines and lockdowns, we saw that they were identifying increased risks for their operations:

1 Information security

As more teams were working remotely or in hybrid structures, data security risks were amplified. Data in systems traditionally housed within secure locations now needed to be accessed by teams working out of the office with no loss of data security or integrity.

How could data security be maintained with these new requirements?

2 On-the-fly processes

Hybrid and remote working provides fewer opportunities for informal or undocumented discussions or on-the-fly processes. The unplanned corridor catch-up or comment in passing was not possible.

How could collaboration be supported with no in-person interaction?

3 Manual process

Physical handovers of documents or evidence, and in-person meetings or approvals – easy to manage when everyone works in one space – became a roadblock.

How could records be maintained accurately and effectively in a virtual environment?

4 Maintaining momentum

With a far greater risk of team disruption due to isolation, quarantine or illness, team leaders needed to ensure that all investigations were up to date and documented in a way that anyone could pick up and progress.

What system could give insight into the status of an investigation and help understand the next steps?

Investigation teams needed to adapt, fast.

“We saw organisations evolve their technology quickly once the external driver was there. And once they started implementation, they realised all the benefits of a single source of truth – and they started exploring the other benefits of a truly integrated system”

Ian Moes, CEO of Condor Investigate

Positive change: unexpected benefits

Systems implemented to mitigate the risks of 'new normal' working conditions were successful. However, in addressing these risks there were unexpected benefits. Building new systems created an environment where outdated processes could be reviewed, and more appropriate and efficient systems created.



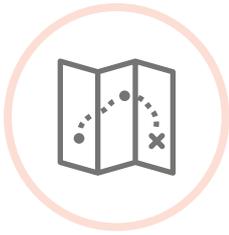
Adding data security increased flexibility and efficiency

The move to a more secure system allowed greater flexibility – not only protecting sensitive information but identifying who specifically had access rights to specific matters and documenting all changes in the system. Teams could work from home or on the road as easily as in the office – meaning travel time was eliminated and information could be input into the system (and shared) immediately, from wherever the investigator was based.



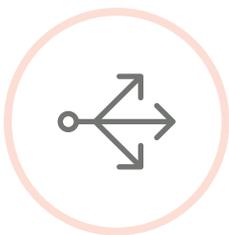
Automating administration generated opportunities for team collaboration

By automating workflows, report generation, status reporting and other communications and notifications, agencies were able to streamline admin, reduce the risk of human error, and free up resources. Additionally, by ensuring that all information was uploaded in real time, different team members (and different teams) were able to access information more quickly than before – meaning increased collaboration and accelerated resolution of cases.



Defining processes helped to optimise resourcing

To automate processes (approvals, document and evidence management etc), teams needed to review existing processes to determine the critical pathways. This process often uncovered efficiencies that freed up time and resources to allow teams to spend time more effectively and communicate more effectively – with the outcome that not only were processes defined and documented more accurately (with all the knock-on effects for briefs, decision-making and management), teams were able to focus their time on matters that added the most value.



Ensuring momentum increased oversight abilities

Implementing systems to mitigate the risks of team disruption involved ensuring that all information was accurately entered, creating a central point of truth for each investigation. Investigators could be reallocated to maintain momentum where isolation, quarantine or illness impacted the team. This approach also provided a transparent and accessible organisation-wide perspective of all investigation activity, allowing managers to easily monitor progress and ensure appropriate resourcing across their teams.

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Condor by Distillery Software has worked with clients across Australia for 10 years to implement and configure systems that standardise, automate, and optimise investigation management and processes – not only making investigators' lives easier but also creating higher quality records and reports. COVID's impact has seen the benefits of these implementations become more pronounced and recognised by managers and investigators in Law Enforcement, Integrity and Misconduct teams, Regulation and Compliance, and Complaint and Incident Management.

Managing risk with investigation management systems

Data security

Prior to 2020, data security relied heavily on physical security measures – storing information on site in secure buildings, rooms, and storage facilities where it could only be accessed by authorised persons. Security procedures that had been developed prior to mainstream, widespread digitalisation of data were not reviewed as information technology evolved. Maintaining security in a physical place was often the pragmatic default position of most law enforcement and investigations management organisations.

New COVID-19 working arrangements distributed the workforce away from one physical location – meaning these historical security measures were not appropriate or even possible. It very quickly became apparent that investigative teams required a new approach, which enabled:

- Clearly defined user roles
- Flexible security access (to teams, individual investigations etc.)
- Remote access to all relevant information and documentation
- Fully auditable systems

The optimal solution to these requirements is a cloud-based system with rigorous security baked-in – like the Condor suite of products.

Condor in action: a case study

Managing resources effectively and securely

A team within one of our clients has responsibility for overseeing active investigations – often in the field. During COVID lockdowns, where field attendance was not possible or appropriate, members of this team had additional capacity.

Other teams were heavily hit with resource constraints. With the flexible security model already configured in Condor, management was easily able to assign them the additional work - simply by giving team members an additional role profile within the Condor system.

Condor's investigation activity-based model along with the automated running sheet enabled the new team to quickly and effectively get up to speed on the history of the investigation (even if briefings from previous assignees were not possible) and complete any assigned tasks or activities – saving time, resources and maintaining crucial investigation timelines. All done in a secure and completely auditable environment with full reporting and transparency.

Key person risk

“It’s every team manager’s nightmare to have an investigative lead knocked out at a critical juncture of an investigation – especially in environments where much of the case knowledge rests with that person.”

Ian Moes, CEO of Condor Investigate

With wave after wave of COVID-19 affecting the workforce, this risk became far greater – teams were struggling with increased absenteeism due to infection, isolation, and quarantine.

Directives to maintain investigation timelines emphasised the need to have all information and data up to date and in a centrally accessible system.

It was quickly a high priority to find – and implement – a solution that enabled resource reassignment without losing time or slowing down investigations. Systems like Condor (with all functionalities available out of the box and the ability to easily configure user roles and assign resourcing as standard) are designed to mitigate these risks – and add value through transparency and reporting functionality.



Condor in action: a case study

Supporting a distributed resource model

A client approached Condor with a specific issue for resolution: a senior leader in the team was recruited from interstate just prior to lockdowns. They needed to evolve their systems and processes to ensure that the new Commissioner could participate in decision making, despite being physically distanced.

The existing process

The existing decision-making process started with a recommendation about specific action from a case analyst. This was reviewed by the manager, and then included in a weekly report of all case recommendations which was circulated to the evaluation panel. Weekly meetings were held (in person, with the Commissioner) by the panel to discuss case recommendations and either endorse or decide on alternative action. The final decision was made by the Commissioner, and then recorded in a series of documents.

The challenge

Lockdowns required the new Commissioner to remain in another state. Isolation and quarantine added new difficulty in scheduling other panel members and there was a general consensus that the level of administration to produce reports and record decisions was unsustainable.

The Condor solution

With an initial scope to simply virtualise the panel meeting, the client soon realised there was an opportunity to improve the whole process.

Together with Condor, a new process was designed and implemented. The new process removed the requirement for co-location or even concurrent working.

Now, the analyst records the recommendation on the Condor case record, and an automated workflow facilitates manager review. Once the manager has passed the file, panel members automatically receive notification that the case is ready for evaluation. Within the dedicated online workspace, panel members can easily review the case details without the need for admin-heavy collation of all reports for the week. Panel members can easily indicate their endorsement of the recommendation, add evaluation comments or indicate a request for further discussion. Meetings of the full panel are now only required in the event that a case needs further discussion. Following the evaluation period, the Commissioner is able to review the case, and all evaluation comments, and make a final decision, which is also recorded in the dedicated online workspace. The formal decision document is automatically generated and digitally signed as part of the workflow.

The silver lining

Implementing systems to mitigate risks has led many investigation teams to realise the benefits of specialist investigation management systems.

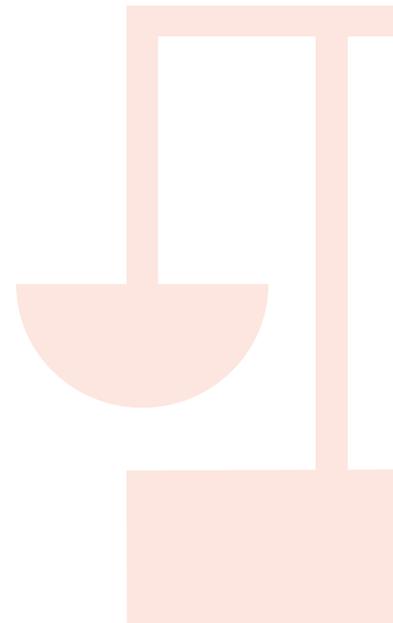
Not only is data now more secure than ever, the flexibility and efficiencies enabled by a cloud-based system support investigation teams' work. The move to a high-quality centralised solution with up-to-date information and intuitive insights into the progress of individual matters made it simpler to effectively manage resources. It also paid unexpected dividends – allowing managers greater transparency into the progress of individuals, teams, and investigations.

Process improvement, automation, and efficiency

Ask many investigators (and we have!) about their personal bugbears, and administration is often their first response. Creating documents and reports, managing approvals, and referring cases takes time and effort which takes away from their core value to investigations.

COVID-19 exacerbated these issues. Many organisations still relied on formal sign-off meetings, printed reports, physical file checklists and wet signatures rather than digital processes.

Engrained into each process was the assumption that teams would continue to access each other in the same space.



Condor in action: a case study

Outdated, resource-heavy processes in action

One of Condor's law enforcement clients realised more than simply the benefits of automation when they implemented our investigation management system.

Process pre-COVID:

A committee of senior law enforcement managers was convened regularly to review all case recommendations and sign-off on next steps. This required a significant investment in time – both to create and compile all case documentations in time for the meeting, and then for all matters to be reviewed as a team and discussed where necessary.

A new system frees up resources

By implementing Condor's investigation management system, all case recommendations can be referred to the members of the committee in real-time (rather than waiting for the regular meeting) with individual evaluations managed asynchronously and without requiring co-location. The system only flags matters for team review where there is disagreement on next steps. This saves time on administration, ensures that the process flows more seamlessly for routine approvals, decreases the time the committee must sit and increases the value of the time spent together by allowing a focus only on the more difficult decisions.

All completed with complete access to all case details and a fully auditable record.

The silver lining

Automation not only reduces administrative burdens but increases efficiency and streamlines processes. By removing the roadblocks associated with in-person, manual activities, investigators are freed up to focus on higher-value tasks.

Specialist software (especially when backed by experts in the field, like at Distillery Software) empowers organisations to remove barriers, pain-points and repetitive time-consuming tasks and ensure their teams are delivering the greatest value, both together and individually – which leads to better outcomes for investigations.

Virtualising collaboration – physical distance improves outcomes

One of the common concerns about a hybrid or virtual investigative team was that the quality of outcomes would drop due to a decrease in collaboration between and across teams.

There was apprehension about the impact of lost informal collaboration: the casual chat across desks; the corridor conversation; the quick pop-in to visit other departments to brief them on cases or receive updates on matters under consideration. The worry was that this lack of personal communication would impact investigation timelines and outcomes.

Of course, no system can replicate the workplace coffee catch-up. However, a move to a centralised system had unexpected benefits that actually improved outcomes.

A clearer chain of custody

Best practice in evidence management is for evidence to be secured once, and to be handled or moved as little as possible, ensuring a clear and transparent record that stands up to scrutiny easily.

Even organisations with centralised investigation management systems often still use traditional methods of managing physical evidence such as the manual property book.

No matter what the type of evidence, remote / asynchronous working has encouraged transitions to digitise systems to tighten evidence processes and create more rigorous chain of evidence documentation.



Digital transition and process improvement

Challenges of the traditional processes



There can be a time-gap between when the evidence is gathered and when a receipt is generated (e.g. from collection in the field to lodgement in the Property room).



Checking evidence in and out of property office is reliant on manual signatures in a separate document log (property book and manual forms)



Weaknesses in chain of evidence can be identified when evidence is checked out for further analysis by investigators or other experts.



The time it takes to process evidence manually (all check-in / check out processes and movement of evidence) requires both parties to be physically co-located to complete the movements.



Manual processes involve more physical movement of evidence and therefore build opportunities for gaps in chain of evidence.

Opportunities of digital transition



All evidence is lodged on the case management system at time of collection and all movements able to be tracked from that point.



More robust check in-check out process supported with modern authorisation techniques like digital signatures, one-time passwords, biometric identity verification.



A digital solution makes it easier to ensure complete and comprehensive evidence records by allowing easier transactions between all parties - all recorded with the evidence record within the case management system.



Evidence workflows managed in a digital system can allow requests to be submitted electronically at any time and transfer arranged when both parties are available saving time and effort.



Less movement of evidence required overall because

- digital versions of the evidence (e.g. documentation / photos) are already stored in the case management system and are accessible by any authorised persons
- an investigator does not need to check out evidence in order to pass it to another expert. Instead they can streamline processes by directly creating a request to review.

Efficiencies between teams

A common frustration of many investigators is the time taken for other teams to process evidence and provide actionable reports. Prior to the implementation of a centralised investigation management system, evidence would sometimes seem to go into a black hole when referred to other teams for forensic or digital examination. Even apart from the backlogs in workflow, all findings would typically be held back until the final report was provided – often causing delays in actioning critical information.

With centralised systems, the evidence record can be updated with findings in real-time – meaning that as each new element or piece of data is confirmed, it is updated onto the evidence record. Investigators no longer need to wait for a final report but can apply new information as it is received, streamlining investigations, and ensuring time-sensitive incidents do not slip.

The silver lining

Although the easy access to team members within and across the organisation has provided challenges, the implementation of secure information management systems allows data to be shared and managed more effectively – leading to more streamlined investigations and more rigorous chain of custody.

Without the external impetus of COVID-19's changes to working practices, the changes in process toward best practice may never have been implemented (or would have taken a long time to integrate).

Key take-outs

COVID-19 has changed the way people and teams work around the world – accelerating the uptake and implementation of a range of digital tools to manage people, information, and organisations.

In the specialised space of investigation management, systems like Condor were developed pre-COVID to support industry best-practice. We were already providing tools to investigation teams around the country developed from decades of industry experience, in-depth understanding of the challenges investigators face, and the skills to develop comprehensive and intuitive solutions.

The advent of COVID-19 removed some of the last barriers to implementing and taking advantage of a system like Condor.

The old systems weren't fit for purpose for the 'new normal' ways of working, and investigation teams needed the security, flexibility, and transparency of a centralised system that also provided automation, insights, and efficiencies.

To facilitate the implementation, organisations had to review outdated systems and processes, unlocking greater productivity and collaboration.

They say every cloud has a silver lining. At Condor it's obvious that COVID-19 had a silver lining for investigation teams – ensuring they are more efficient and productive for the long term.



About us

Distillery Software has over 20 years of experience providing enterprise-grade investigation and intelligence management solutions for government agencies and the private sector in Australia and internationally.

Distillery's Condor Investigate suite is the product of decades of specialist industry experience and focus on supporting the specific requirements of investigative processes.

Each Condor solution can be used individually or integrates seamlessly to provide an end-to-end enterprise-grade package of specialist investigation and intelligence case management software solutions. Condor customers include a broad array of law enforcement, investigative, intelligence, regulatory and compliance agencies in Australia and overseas.

Condor has been purpose-built from our industry expertise to exceed the needs of today's connected world where reliability, flexibility, interoperability, services orientation, and mobile capabilities are now expectations.

Industry experts on your team

With over 100 years of industry experience, our team has a thorough understanding of end-to-end investigative and intelligence management processes, paired with world-class IT security knowledge. We have developed and refined a proven agile approach to designing and implementing solutions that meet your organisation's specific investigation and intelligence case management requirements.

We also know that providing the solution is just the first step in the journey. Not only do we offer an end-to-end software solution, but we also offer end-to-end customer service, ongoing support and enhancements as your environment and requirements evolve. Our clients are our top priority, and our ability to continue delivering value and impress is reflected in our many long-term partnerships with our clients, many spanning well over a decade.

Clients include

Victoria Police
Queensland Police
Queensland Crime & Corruption Commission
Department of Home Affairs
Law Enforcement Conduct Commission

Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption
Commission (IBAC)
Northern Territory ICAC
ACT Integrity Commission
NSW Justice

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