

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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**Marketing A Small or Mid-sized Police Department**  
How to Develop Basic Printed Materials to Increase Recruiting Power  
for Small or Mid-Sized Police Agencies

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
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**By  
Jeff R. Hayes**

**Cedar Park Police Department  
Cedar Park, Texas  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Small and mid-sized law enforcement agencies find themselves competing on a relatively uneven playing field with larger agencies when recruiting quality officer candidates. Direct print marketing is an inexpensive and practical approach for the delivery of recruiting information. Brochures, posters, and direct mailers are methods utilized by mainstream organizations, and have worked effectively for larger law enforcement agencies as well. The question this research explored is whether quality printed marketing materials have a significant impact on actually increasing the recruiting power of small and mid-sized departments. This study illustrates a correlation between direct print marketing and its effect on the decisions of potential police candidates when considering application at a particular agency. Additionally, this study shows small and mid-sized departments that they can produce quality materials within available resources to enhance their recruiting efforts and compete with larger agencies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Small and mid-sized police departments find themselves competing on a relatively uneven playing field with larger police agencies when recruiting quality officer candidates. Larger departments appear to have the edge with more extensive resources and can produce marketing materials that may dissuade potential candidates from considering application at a smaller police agency. As a result, many of the qualities that make a particular community one of the fastest growing in the country and attractive to thousands of new families and businesses, may not be appropriately conveyed to police candidates as potential benefits. Although money may likely be a primary factor in an applicant's consideration of a potential employer, it is not always the ultimate driving factor. As more educated and mature applicants begin considering police work as a career, many begin to evaluate other factors such as family, quality of life, environmental risks, and other factors of employment outside of mere finances. When asked, many police officers admit that they did not pursue law enforcement as a career to get rich, but to serve the community or contribute to society in some way. Identifying these other benefits offered by a small or mid-sized may be the key to trumping larger departments in the recruiting game. Benefits other than money must be clearly communicated to applicants and potential officer candidates in a manner that best illustrates what the smaller department has to offer over the larger. Direct print marketing is an inexpensive and practical approach to the delivery of recruiting information. Brochures, posters, and direct mailers are powerful methods utilized by mainstream marketing, and have worked effectively for larger police agencies as well.

However, smaller agencies are faced with resource issues not encountered by larger departments, resulting in obstacles to effective communication.

The question this research explores is whether quality printed marketing materials have a significant impact on actually increasing the recruiting power of small and mid-sized departments. This study will attempt to clearly illustrate a correlation between direct print marketing and its effect on the decisions of potential candidates when considering application at a particular organization. Additionally, this study will show that small and mid-sized departments can produce quality-marketing materials within available resources, many found “in-house,” to enhance recruiting efforts when competing with larger agencies. Research methods utilized will include review of relevant literature, marketing methods and advertising research, as well as surveys of those officers, academy cadets, and other potential applicants who would come in to direct contact with any developed recruiting information. As a result, this research is intended to show that direct marketing influences potential applicants and their perceptions of a small or mid-sized police department will be altered by the information presented in the developed marketing materials. Utilizing information and conclusions from this research will equip small and mid-sized departments with information that will allow them to compete more aggressively for potential applicants and will give them tools to lure qualified and quality candidates to their agency rather than a larger department.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The term “marketing” is not commonly associated with police recruiting. As a result, one has to turn to the corporate or small business world to examine certain

methodologies commonly used by these private entities and adapt the principles or techniques for a law enforcement organization's specific circumstances. Michael Phillips and Salli Rasberry have written several books jointly and separately on Small Business Marketing, which provide basic principles that can be easily adapted for use by small or mid-sized departments to increase recruiting potential. Phillips and Rasberry (2003) specifically focus on the limited resources of small business and methods of maximizing those resources. Small and mid-sized agencies would benefit from applying some of the basic approaches to increase the effectiveness of any marketing they hope to achieve when recruiting potential applicants. As with all private and public entities, budgets often drive the amount of marketing materials produced by an organization, but effective marketing can be achieved with little budgetary impact.

Phillips and Rasberry (2003) begin working from a basic premise that should be closely examined by a law enforcement organization that wants to market itself to prospective employees. Marketing begins by running a first-rate agency with the idea that an organization's image cannot be manufactured through clever advertising or gimmicks. The agency must first be a quality organization, and marketing is just telling other people about the organization's specific qualities. More importantly, every action an organization takes sends a marketing message to prospective employees. Without a quality organization in place, an agency will only be deceiving potential applicants who will quickly learn that they were misled and move on to the next potential job opportunity. With this foundation in place, an agency may begin to discuss various methods for "getting the word out" about the organization that has impact on the potential customer without a great impact on the agency's resources. An agency must know the target customer, decide the best method to educate potential customers, how

to let those customers know what the agency can offer, and how the customer can make contact with the organization. For the purposes of this research, this methodology will be address within the context of printed media, specifically recruiting posters, direct mailer cards, and brochures that can be used to market any small or mid-sized law enforcement organization.

Janet McMurtry (2003) indicated that an organization should begin by identifying its strengths, but to do so through its potential customer's eyes. Likewise, the agency should identify its weaknesses and be prepared to address any questions in a positive manner that might be generated by a potential customer. Focus on a presentation whereby a potential customer is given only truthful information about the agency, so that any approach taken builds trust between the organization and the potential customer. In any marketing approach, including printed media, an agency should identify its strengths, especially those that might not be readily apparent, and promote those strengths in the medium of choice. To identify strengths, the organization should ask seven relevant questions that can be applied when developing a simple print media marketing strategy. Those questions are paraphrased as follows: 1) What strengths are commonly associated with the organization; 2) What strengths does the organization associate with itself; 3) What strengths are associated with the culture surrounding the organization; 4) What do current employees say about the organization; 5) What do potential customers currently think about the organization; 6) What does the agency believe is the overall reputation of the organization in the market place; and 7) Has the organization received peer or industry recognition? Additionally, the agency should ask the potential customer base four relevant questions. Those questions are paraphrased as follows: 1) What is the single most important attribute the organization can offer; 2)

What attributes, positive or negative, are most commonly associated with the organization; 3) What benefits are associated with the organization; and, 4) How did the customer learn about the organization in the first place? If one will determine the answers to these questions, an agency will better be able to develop a strategy that will maximize whatever marketing approach is chosen.

There are costs associated with an organization's choice to utilize direct marketing methods like posters, mailer cards, and brochures. However, there are approaches that will reduce the impact on an organization's established budget, if the agency will identify the customer demographic and target print media to a "segmented" audience, as well as utilizing resources within the organization to accomplish some print media production requirements. Segmenting or identifying a specific customer base can focus efforts and more effectively target an organization's limited resources toward customers where it will have the greatest impact. Likewise, specifying the target customer gives purpose to the design of the particular media and guides the information to be contained in that media.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Small and mid-sized law enforcement agencies find themselves competing on a somewhat uneven playing field with larger agencies when recruiting quality officer candidates. Larger departments may give the impression that they have the edge with bigger budgets and the ability to produce marketing materials that potentially dissuade candidates from considering application at a smaller agency. Direct print marketing is an inexpensive and practical approach for the delivery of recruiting information. Brochures, posters, and direct mailers are methods utilized by mainstream



organizations, and have worked effectively for larger law enforcement agencies as well. Again, smaller agencies are faced with resource issues not encountered by their larger counterparts, resulting in obstacles to effective communication. The question this research explores is whether quality printed marketing materials have a significant impact on actually increasing the recruiting power of small and mid-sized departments. This study will attempt to clearly illustrate a correlation between direct print marketing and its effect on the decisions of potential police candidates when considering application at a particular agency. Additionally, this study will show small and mid-sized departments that they can produce quality materials within available resources to enhance their recruiting efforts and compete with larger agencies.

Based on the review of relevant literature relating to small business marketing, it is possible for small and mid-sized law enforcement agencies to utilize some of the basic marketing principles to develop basic printed materials that will increase recruiting power by communicating the beneficial attributes of a department to prospective applicants. Additionally, the production of quality brochures, posters, and direct mailer cards can be accomplished through “in house” resources that will have a low impact on a limited departmental budget. With some creativity, small and mid-sized police agencies can reach potential applicants with as much impact as larger departments.

This study focused on current academy cadets, recent academy graduates, college-aged criminal justice students, and other potential law enforcement candidates that were considering application at various types of law enforcement organizations. This study group was identified as the most likely group to be influenced by recruiting materials and would provide the best information for measuring the impact of those recruiting materials on their decisions at which agencies to apply. A survey was

constructed and submitted to the study group that asked specific questions regarding the possible influence of posters, direct mailer cards, and brochures on the group's decision to choose a particular department at which to apply. The intent of this research is to provide information to small and mid-sized law enforcement agencies that illustrates the value of developing basic printed recruiting materials that would influence potential applicants to choose their agency over a larger competing agency.

## FINDINGS

Methods of communication and information distribution are increasingly more demanding. In the early years of television, the public received national news at approximately 6:00 PM every evening from one person who sat at a desk and read the news. In the late 1960s, video and film footage, along with the increasing interest in "on-the-scene" reporting, required news producers to begin intermixing added media in newscasts. It was in the 1980s that CNN began a new approach of more graphics, both with and without news substance, giving more and more information faster and much of it simultaneously on the screen. Today, most cable news channels will have five to six pieces of information or visual stimuli on the screen at any given time during a newscast.

A generation of potential officer candidates have grown-up in the information age, many of those with exposure to computers from the time they were mere children. Information is expected to be quickly accessible by the contemporary candidate and some are so impatient, that they will not consider a perspective employer if the information is not readily available for them to make career decisions. It can be argued that the Internet and websites are the cheapest and most effective way to get out the

most information about a department. One must agree on this principle early in the process of this research. However, there is still great value in printed media, which if used appropriately will point potential candidates to a website that will provide them with the comprehensive information they need. Small business marketing authorities agree that if an agency develops printed media that points the user to a website, that site will need to be complete, easy to navigate, and provide more than the information presented on a poster, or in a brochure, or a direct mailer piece. Information obtained through the survey instrument indicated that the majority of those surveyed have seen and responded to a recruiting poster, direct mailer, or brochure. Those surveyed also indicated that when a printed piece did not contain a website reference address, they were less likely to follow-up and investigate the department further.

In 2001, when trying to fill just 72 vacant positions, the Austin Police Department used recruiting methods such as bumper stickers, pre-show ads in movie theaters, and radio announcements to attract prospective officer candidates (Stanley, 2001). Larger departments have used these methods in addition to newspaper ads, billboards, and in some cases television commercials. One method commonly used by larger departments and open to small and mid-sized agencies, is job fair appearances. When asked, those who responded to the survey instrument indicated that a small or mid-sized agency had just as much potential of gaining a prospective employee's attention as their larger counterparts. Those surveyed indicate that the materials and information available at the respective booth did influence their attention. Interestingly enough, the survey results indicated that more respondents had recalled receiving printed recruiting media from large and mid-sized departments as compared to smaller ones. This last survey result may be an indicator that smaller agencies either had poor quality or no recruiting

materials available to distribute to potential applicants. The most significant information obtained through the survey instrument is that the survey group, academy cadets, criminal justice majors, and other similar prospective candidates, indicated that they might be inclined to apply at a small or mid-sized department if given enough information to weigh objectively. Additionally, respondents indicated that the information should be comprehensive, truthful, and current.

## DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

Small and mid-sized police departments must compete with larger police agencies for recruiting prospective officers and personnel. Due to a greater level of resources available to larger departments, small and mid-size agencies find themselves on an uneven playing-field when attempting to communicate with prospective employees. This study will show small and mid-sized departments that they can market themselves by producing quality marketing materials with available resources that will enhance their recruiting efforts and increase their ability to communicate with prospective employees, thereby competing more evenly with larger agencies. Effective marketing is partly the result of exposing your target group to your name and your selling points as often as possible, in as many ways as possible, and as cost-effectively as possible (Sussman, 2005).

The findings suggest that potential applicant's attention can be drawn to a small or mid-sized department and their choice of where to apply can be swayed by information presented on posters, brochures, and direct mailer cards. The information obtained through the survey and discovered in the relevant literature suggests that if small and mid-sized departments will spend the time, effort, and a small amount of

money to prepare and tactically distribute printed recruiting materials, it will increase the number of potential candidates applying at their agencies. Additionally, these materials can be produced with little impact on available resources, if agencies will seek out resources located right under their proverbial noses. Many untapped resources available to small or mid-sized police department can be found within the organization itself or within the community the agency serves. In his article, *Marketing the Smaller Agency*, found in the September 2004 issue of *The Police Chief* magazine, Harvey E. Sprafka (2004), Chief of Police of Knoxville, Iowa, says in his article about small town marketing efforts, "Sadly, some smaller agencies overlook the advantages and resources available," and "The result for the local police executive can be a missed opportunity to get the department's story out."

The first step a small or mid-sized department should take when deciding to produce printed recruiting materials is to understand what the basic materials are. Recruiting posters are the most commonly used printed material and are an accepted and recognizable method for recruiting. Posters have been used successfully by the military and many other organizations when seeking potential recruits. Brochures are also a commonly accepted method for delivering recruiting information and are most often found at personal contact events, such as job fairs or academy visits. The brochure can be produced in many forms, but the most common is the "tri-fold" style made from an 8.5x11 sheet of paper. The brochure can contain more comprehensive information and is an opportunity to include more photos and images that can speak volumes. Everyone has heard the saying, "A picture speaks a thousand words." This is a valuable axiom and should be held in consideration when developing any of the basic printed materials. The direct mailer card is a more tactical delivery system for recruiting

information. The use of a direct mailer card requires additional research on the part of the recruiting agency. Most often a mailing list is obtained from local training academies or criminal justice colleges, which allow a department to send an inexpensive card to the home of a prospective recruit. The card is often simple in design, focused on images and photos, with specific follow-up information on how to contact a recruiter or obtain additional information. Due to the size of the card and the resulting postal rates, the direct mailer card is more appropriate to send through the mail than a brochure. A brochure is a good piece of follow-up material that can be sent once a candidate has replied to the direct mailer card.

When the the decision to produce and distribute recruiting posters, direct mailers, or brochures, the agency will need to find a designer. One way to do this is to survey the department for individuals who might possess graphic arts, journalism, creative writing background, or simply someone just interested in helping develop such materials. Many skills necessary to develop recruiting materials are often found within the officer ranks themselves. If one is lucky enough, a small or mid-sized agency will find a person working in the department that possesses the creativity to help develop the materials. Local high school and college classes are also an untapped resource for those with design and graphic skills. Agencies should seek out students and instructors who might be interested in developing the materials as part of a class assignment. This approach will benefit both the student and the department. The department has someone to design their printed materials, and the student receives credit for the assignment, that he or she can show as part of their developing portfolio of completed projects. Many times this partnership will not only provide smaller departments with a quality product, but may open the door to free or inexpensive printing resources.

Additionally, departments should begin collecting other recruiting materials from other agencies that can be used to design the look and feel of their own printed materials. John Fellegi (2005), columnist for the Internet marketing magazine, My Own Business Marketing is an advocate of this technique when he suggests that the agency should make a list of the most successful organizations that fall within the agency's field of interest and study them. Why reinvent the wheel as they say, having these other examples can help someone outside the police culture better understand what the organization is trying to achieve, and will then in turn allow that person to produce a more effective piece. Students and instructors, or anyone outside the police culture, should be guided through contemporary police ideals so to avoid stereotypical images or police clichés that would possibly convey a negative image. The website, Work Place Results by Network Training Group (2004), describes the culture of an organization as a mix of written and unwritten beliefs, attitudes, values and rules that dictate behavior in the organization. In some situations, culture speaks more loudly than policies. It is extremely important that the culture of the particular agency is communicated appropriately, both in content and image. The agency should control the image it projects in its recruiting materials, and that image must always be honest, accurate, and appropriate to the audience. It is important to remember that recruiting materials find themselves in the hands of others in the organization's community that may not be the targeted audience. An agency should be wise when selecting photos and content, use only that which reflects the honest culture of the department.

The content must also be designed to prompt individuals to take further action. For example, the poster, direct mailer, or recruiting brochure must be designed to encourage a phone call to a recruiter, where to go for more information, how to find an

application, or how to get to follow-up information by guiding the prospective employee to a website on the Internet. Chad Hall, a church marketing specialist for the website CoolChurches.com, refers to this when creating marketing materials for churches. Hall (2005) suggests that many churches will send out vague messages that are intended to bring people to church, but which have no “hook.” Effective marketing gets people to take action. In contrast, poor marketing demonstrates a lack of clarity as to what you are inviting people to do. Likewise, a small or mid-sized department must develop their printed recruiting materials with clear messages and guidance on how interested parties can take the next step in the process. All posters, direct mailers, and brochures should contain clear and concise contact information and a website address if applicable. The obvious danger is that you will have an attractive and powerful poster, brochure, or direct mailer that is rendered ineffective by its lack of contact and follow-up information.

Logistical information is important, but what are you trying to communicate when you send, post, or handout recruiting material? “This is a good organization,” “this organization is better than that organization,” and “this organization has something to offer that the others don’t,” are just a few of the messages that are primary in any recruiting materials. When developing these materials, it is easy to succumb to the “they’re bigger, so they’re better” trap. An organization will need to ask itself very important questions and then convey that information in recruiting materials to the target audience, a potential officer employee. In important concept to remember is that every action taken by an organization reflects the true nature of that organization’s culture. If the organization is operating a successful program, get the word out first in local publications or on the agency website, then remind people of those successes in recruiting materials. For example, if the organization has a successful a recognized



crime prevention program, then make note of that in the material. Build on the positive successes made by the department. If the organization's primary mission is "community style" policing, let prospective applicants know this. Placing this information on recruiting material will help a prospective employee know more about the agency's goals and objectives. If the organization has a "mission statement," or set of "core values," include this information, as it clearly conveys the department's culture.

Trying to balance what an organization might want to tell a prospective employee and what that prospective employee might want to know an organization is tricky business. Small business author Janet McMurtry offers a set of questions that will help an agency determine its strengths, from the perspective of a recruit. McMurtry suggests that an organization should ask some questions when determining the strengths the organization wishes to communicate to potential applicants: 1) What strengths are commonly associated with your agency; 2) What strengths do you associate with your agency or your successes in the community; 3) What general strengths are associated with the culture surrounding your particular department or law enforcement apply to your department; 4) What do your current employees say about your agency and its strengths; 5) What do potential recruits commonly know, believe, or feel about your agency; 6) What do you believe is the overall reputation of your agency in the local community or in the law enforcement community; and 7) Have you received peer or community recognition for your agency for events, programs, or other relevant successes? Once an organization has determined the answers to some of these basic questions, it will have a firm foundation on which to build the content and subject matter of graphics chosen to include in your materials.

To better determine what prospective employees might want to know about the agency, a short survey can be developed and administered in written or verbal form. Spend time researching and create a strategic marketing plan. Determine the needs of customers through market research. A few good questions to start with are: 1) What is the single most important attribute the organization can offer the recruit; 2) What attributes, positive or negative, does a potential officer candidate, most commonly associate with the agency; 3) What benefits are associate with the agency; and, 4) How did you learn about the organization in the first place? If a small business, or in this case a small or mid-sized police department, will determine the answers to these questions, the agency will better be able to develop a strategy that will maximize the creation and distribution of recruiting materials.

Production of the materials can be accomplished in many ways. Most printing companies are willing to work with law enforcement agencies in these circumstances. Many times, if a department will allow the printer to include their business name in the materials, the printer will produce the items for free or offer a significant discount. For example, the printer company's name can be included at the bottom of a poster or mailer card, or on the back of a brochure by preceding the business name with, "Courtesy of," "In partnership with," or "Compliments of." If a local printing service is unable to help, a local newspaper can be contacted. The newspaper can also offer resources at a reduced cost to the department or for free. Like a local printer, the newspaper may provide printing services with only a reference to their newspaper in the material similar to those methods listed previously for the private printer. Finally, if the agency cannot find a local printing source, one can print the items on an "in-house" color printer or copy-machine. Although the most costly of the options, high quality results can

be achieved from contemporary printers by using specialty papers and color inks. The advantage to this method is that you would only print what you need. An organization would print only as many posters as needed and reprint more only if necessary. When creating mailer cards, the agency would only print the number needed to send to prospective candidates. The drawback of using “in-house” computer, printers, and copiers for brochures is that these items are usually distributed by hand and resources can be depleted rapidly, especially if the organization has achieved the desired high level of quality.

The findings of this research suggest that a potential applicant’s attention can be drawn to a small or mid-sized department and the prospective candidate’s choice where to apply can be swayed by effective recruiting materials. Marketing is simply getting the word out about a particular law enforcement organization. All agencies are living with profound changes in recruiting methods in this “information age” world. Small and mid-sized departments can no longer depend on the local newspaper ads to entice prospective employees. Small and mid-sized organizations must dedicate the time, effort, and a reasonable amount of money to produce recruiting posters, brochures, and direct mailer cards to compete with larger agencies for quality officer candidates. As more educated and mature applicants begin considering police work as a career, many begin to evaluate other factors such as family, quality of life, environmental risks, and other factors outside of mere salaries. It is commonly accepted that most law enforcement officers did not pursue law enforcement as a career to get rich, but to serve the community or contribute to society in some way. When your agency follows some basic principles practiced by small businesses, identifying these unique benefits offered by a small or mid-sized organization may be the key to trumping larger departments in

the recruiting game. Agency strengths other than money must be clearly identified and communicated to potential officer candidates. Direct print marketing is an inexpensive and practical approach to the delivery of recruiting information. Brochures, posters, and direct mailers are powerful methods utilized by mainstream marketing, and have worked effectively for larger police agencies, and can work for the small and mid-sized police department as well.

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## Appendix

### LAW ENFORCEMENT RECRUITING / MARKETING SURVEY

Your participation in the following survey will help determine whether there is a correlation between direct print marketing and its effect on the decisions of potential police candidates when considering application at a particular agency.

Have you seen or been given printed recruiting media by a law enforcement agency in the past, including posters, brochures, or direct mailer cards?

☐ Yes      ☐ No

Did you respond to the printed media with any follow-up actions, including searching for more information on the Internet or contacting the agency that produced and distributed the recruiting material?

☐ Yes      ☐ No

If you received recruiting information, did it influence your interest in applying for a particular agency?

☐ Yes      ☐ No

When you received recruiting information, was it from a large department, small / mid-sized department, or both?

☐ Large Department      ☐ Small / Mid-Sized Department ☐ Both

Have you ever received printed recruiting materials that were lacking in information or of such poor quality that you immediately dismissed any idea of follow-up action?

☐ Yes      ☐ No

Have you ever contacted a law enforcement agency and requested recruiting materials and been told that there are no such materials available?

☐ Yes      ☐ No

If the answer to the above question was "yes," did you maintain your interest in that particular agency?

☐ Yes      ☐ No

If a recruiting poster, direct mailer, or brochure failed to contain a website address for follow-up, are you more or less likely to maintain your interest in trying to obtain information about a particular law enforcement agency.

☐ Less Likely      ☐ More Likely

If provided appropriate information through recruiting information, does a small or mid-sized police agency have an equal chance of gaining your attention and interest in potential employment?

☐ Yes      ☐ No

When reviewing recruiting information about a particular department is it more or less important to you the prospective applicant, that the following specifications are met?

Current and up-to-date information	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Comprehensive / detailed information	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Truthful information	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Content over Photos	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Follow-up Contact Directions	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Application Directions	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Website Directions	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Telephone Contact Information	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Agency Address Information	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Photos of Agency Members	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Photos of Agency Vehicles	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Photo of Agency Headquarters	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Photo of Agency Badge	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Photo of Agency Uniform	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important