

Title - 10 Years of Video Redaction - Unveiling the Lessons Learned.

Subtitle - Through the collection and analysis of video evidence, our aim is to bring to light the challenges of video redaction and provide a comprehensive understanding of its implications for law enforcement.



Introduction-

Criminal justice technology is simply amazing. There is so much nuance, including the hidden costs of video redaction. Over the last 10 years, the rapid advancement of body-worn camera technology has created a sudden surge in the creation and dissemination of video content surrounding police interactions with the public. With this surge emerged the crucial need to protect the privacy of individuals captured within these videos. As a response, the field of video redaction has evolved significantly, aiming to strike a delicate balance between preserving public safety and safeguarding personal privacy.

Within this paper, we explore the challenges encountered and suggest innovative solutions and lessons learned along the way. By gathering data and analyzing the evolution of this field, we aim to shed light on the impact of video redaction and understand the implications it has for law enforcement.

Key Findings-

The law enforcement community cares deeply about video redaction. Each day, they take on the enormous responsibility of having to manage all incoming information requests and find innovative teams of video specialists that process and redact body-worn camera video. Implementing a robust video redaction program does not happen overnight. So much depends on the policy and state statutes surrounding the agency. There is high variation, and the overall impact is mostly due to developing clear redaction guidance.

The idea that body-worn cameras are changing the game is only half the narrative. The next half is getting the video, out to the public in a timely manner. This is only possible after privacy concerns have been taken into account and any private information has been redacted. The real game-changer is a great redaction team. Overall, a huge level of implementation has been established in recording video, but there has been very little consideration for video redaction.

The team at Focal Forensics has put together some key takeaways from what we have learned over the last 10 years redacting thousands of videos, audio, and images from police departments across the united states. We wanted to share this with you in order to help those considering starting a redaction program or making theirs better.

10 Key Takeaways:

1. Always lean towards a broad disclosure policy to promote transparency and accountability while taking into account privacy considerations;
2. Use regular quality assurance compliance checks for each video, audio or image;
3. Use the redacted video footage as a coaching mechanism to teach other redaction specialists;
4. Learn about different techniques such as full frame blurs, rotoscoping inside homes, and the use of custom masks for unique objects in each video;
5. Don't be afraid to seek help from 3rd party providers or surrounding agencies;
6. Every video is different, and each comes with a level of nuance;
7. Collect a training database of easy, medium, and difficult videos to train with. This database should include difficult redaction situations that can be shown to new employees as examples that embody excellent redaction work;
8. Expand the quality assurance auditing team for difficult videos. More eyes, less stress, and a drop in any accidental errors;
9. One should always compare the video to the redaction guidance and determine if there are any inconsistencies;
10. Always consider the mental health of those processing videos with graphic subject matter.

Basic Expectations-

When a department implements a new video redaction program, citizens have high expectations that the redaction program will quickly help their department and the interactions between police and citizens. If a critical incident video is kept away from the public due to the level of complex video redaction work, or quality assurance, this can reflect poorly on the department in terms of transparency.

1. Redaction should improve transparency and accountability, instead of creating suspicion of department integrity or wrongdoing.
2. Releasing video can change the behaviors of citizens and officers.
3. Citizens have a high expectation that a redaction program will help their department and the interactions between police and citizens.

Just because you buy running shoes doesn't make you a marathon runner. Likewise, just because you buy BWCs isn't going to make your department fully transparent. It's the redaction policy and procedures you lay out that determine the level of success with transparency. Managing expectations when it comes to video redaction is vital for successful implementation and effective communication within organizations. It starts with clearly defining the objectives and limitations of the redaction process to stakeholders. Educating key personnel about the complexities, resources required, and time constraints involved in video redaction sets realistic expectations from the outset. Open and transparent communication about the challenges and potential limitations of the redaction software or techniques is crucial to avoid unrealistic expectations. Additionally, establishing clear guidelines and protocols for the redaction process, including turnaround times and quality assurance measures, helps manage expectations by providing a framework for all parties involved. Regular updates on the progress and any potential delays or issues can also help stakeholders understand the ongoing efforts and ensure alignment between their expectations and the reality of video redaction. By effectively managing expectations, organizations can foster trust, minimize misunderstandings, and ensure a smoother and more successful video redaction process.

Developing a Culture of Continuous Redaction Improvement

Developing a culture of continuous video redaction improvement begins with establishing a mindset that recognizes the importance of video redaction and its impact on protecting individuals' identities and confidential data. By fostering an environment that encourages learning and growth, teams can continually refine their redaction techniques and stay updated with the latest technologies and best practices. This culture thrives on open communication, where employees can share their knowledge, challenges, and innovative solutions.

Regular training sessions, workshops, and knowledge-sharing platforms play a crucial role in enhancing skills and promoting a collaborative approach. We suggest asking other agencies to join in on putting together videos they use to train their redaction team. A BWC redaction training database aids all surrounding agencies and participants.

Often times the people implementing the redaction policy are not doing the actual work themselves. This can lead to an extreme level of disconnect. The expectations of being able to redact and release sensitive material can outweigh the ability and time it takes to get the video out to the public. The moment you think you have the perfect redaction policy for video redaction, you don't. Constantly evolve, change, and develop, based on events within your community.

Starting a Redaction Program-

When starting a video redaction program, a few considerations must be taken into account to ensure its effectiveness and compliance with legal and ethical standards. Understanding any and all legal requirements governing the specific jurisdiction in which the program will operate is crucial. Most importantly, defining clear and comprehensive redaction guidelines is essential to ensure consistency and adherence to best practices. Considerations should also be given to the selection of appropriate redaction tools, taking into account factors such as accuracy, efficiency, and compatibility with existing systems. Will you be able to scale up and down this program depending on the amount of video that needs to be processed?

Training and education for the personnel involved in the redaction process is another critical aspect, ensuring they possess the necessary skills and knowledge to identify and redact sensitive information effectively. Establishing secure data management practices to protect the confidentiality of the redacted footage is vital. Lastly, ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and adjustment of the program should be implemented to identify areas for improvement and address any emerging challenges.

Bring in your local prosecutor's office. Have them understand what is being redacted and why. Have them verify any concerns. Ask yourself what is the overall goal of this program. It should

be to provide an accurate account of events to the public, as fast as possible, while maintaining the integrity of private citizen information. Consider what you will do about 3rd party (CCTV or cellphone) video. How will you handle proprietary videos, audio, and images? It's always best during the course of disclosure to give the public as many data points as possible. When it comes to transparency the more media a department can push out, the better the story they can tell. By carefully considering these factors, organizations can establish a robust video redaction program that respects privacy, complies with legal requirements, and maintains the integrity of the redaction process.

Speed Vs Accuracy-

We put out a short survey to those in the field who are already redacting videos. We asked them how fast they typically release a redacted critical incident video. As expected, the answer was not so simple and the time frames varied significantly.

- 48 hours (Seattle)
- 5 business days (Washington DC)
- 14 days - (Minnesota)
- 21 days (Colorado)
- 45 days - (Los Angeles)
- Years - (Florida)
- 27 days - (Washington)

The ability to redact videos effectively with 100% accuracy is essential to ensure the timely release of critical evidence while maintaining the privacy of certain individuals. Delayed or inaccurate redaction can hinder the goal of balancing transparency with privacy. Efficient redaction is key regarding balancing the public rights to know. Your department wants to get the video out as fast as possible. This is the bottom line. In order to do this, you need an experienced team of highly-skilled redaction specialists with the latest software to produce industry-leading excellence.

Accuracy in video redaction means that all personally identifiable information (PII), confidential data, and sensitive details are effectively and completely removed or obscured from the footage.

Any mistakes or oversights in the redaction process can lead to unintended exposure of personal information, compromising privacy. Accurate redaction instills trust and confidence among stakeholders, including the public, customers, and employees, in an organization's commitment to safeguarding privacy. By prioritizing accuracy over speed in video redaction, organizations will uphold privacy standards, protect individuals' identities, and maintain the trust of those they serve within their community.

Video Redaction Contractors

To meet tight deadlines and stay within budget, it is essential to have the capability to scale redaction operations rapidly. To achieve this successfully, one must seek a secure, skilled, and reliable third-party provider proficient in handling sensitive video evidence. Engaging local television stations or wedding video services won't suffice, as they lack the qualifications for such work.

Key Benefits

1. Expertise and Specialization
2. Time and Cost Savings
3. Compliance and Legal Assurance
4. Access to Advanced Tools and Technology
5. Confidentiality and Security

Look for a redaction provider with a deep understanding of video evidence, strictly adhering to CJIS guidelines established by the DOJ. The chosen service provider should employ a robust quality assurance process to rectify any initial errors that might inadvertently expose the identity of individuals within the video. The stakes are high during this process, necessitating careful review by a trained eye. There is simply no margin for error when it comes to video redaction and safeguarding privacy. It is imperative to ensure the provider's integrity and trustworthiness align with your department's values.

Mental Health-

Video redaction specialists face unique and significant mental health concerns as a result of their demanding and emotionally challenging work. These professionals are responsible for reviewing and analyzing distressing and traumatic video footage on a regular basis, which can include scenes of violence, abuse, and other distressing events. The constant exposure to such graphic content can lead to secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Additionally, video redaction specialists may experience feelings of helplessness as they are tasked with determining what should be redacted and what should be made public, balancing the need for transparency with the responsibility to protect individual privacy. It is crucial for law enforcement agencies to recognize and address the mental health concerns of video redaction specialists, providing them with proper support, resources, and training to mitigate the potential impact on their well-being

We suggest teaming up with the psychologists on staff and invite them to help the department articulate the stress and psychological effects of watching shootings and other traumatic events. Give them the same mental health benefits and resources as the officers that were there on the scene and went through that experience. Let them talk with others on staff to discuss the event and unpack any issues that might come up. Certain situations such as the involvement of animals or children might trigger or overwhelm a video redaction specialist. It's important to know your staff well and ensure they have the proper resources to cope with the burden that comes with watching critical incident videos.

Final Thoughts-

Implementing a video redaction program can be a huge challenge even for large departments with significant staff and financial resources. A decade of video redaction has transformed the way we approach privacy protection in law enforcement. By highlighting the lessons learned, we strive to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the responsible use of video redaction, ensuring that privacy is safeguarded in an increasingly interconnected world. Focal Forensics cares deeply about transparency and believes video redaction is often extremely undervalued. By providing a clear and unbiased visual record of events, a redacted video can help:

- Improve the overall relationship between law enforcement and the community.
- Build stronger relationships between law enforcement and the public.
- Maintain trust and accountability within a community.
- Allow for an accurate understanding of what occurred to be released.

At Focal Forensics, we are proud to champion the balance between privacy and transparency, making a positive impact on the relationships between law enforcement and the community. We remain dedicated to our mission of preserving trust, fostering accountability, and promoting an accurate understanding of events through our unwavering commitment to excellence, fairness, and integrity.

What our clients are saying-

“My experience with Focal Forensics was excellent. Their expertise, professionalism, attention to detail, and exceptional results surpassed my expectations. I highly recommend their services to anyone in need of video redaction, as they provide a valuable and reliable solution for protecting sensitive information and ensuring privacy compliance.”

- Jose L. Garza - Chief of Police - Reedley Police Department

“Working with Focal Forensics was super easy, and they completed the work that was required by a court order, way more quickly than we ever could have. It took a lot of weight off my shoulders by assigning the heavy, tedious redactions to them. What was estimated to take us over a year to complete, took their team just under two weeks. I highly recommend Focal Forensics for body cam video redactions and am looking forward to having them available on an as-needed basis.”

- Stephanie Boorman - Public Records Officer - City of Quincy, Washington