

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Tipsters can go online to give information

An online chat feature allows Crime Stoppers to communicate with tipsters to glean more information on crime leads.

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FORT WORTH — Targeting the computer-savvy, Tarrant County Crime Stoppers has added a tool for people to submit anonymous tips about crime — the Web chat.

The feature, developed by Fort Worth-based Nexus Systems and begun Sept. 23, allows tipsters to communicate via instant messaging. It is the latest in a string of technological advances being used by Tarrant County Crime Stoppers to field tips beyond the group's phone hot line.

Tipsters can also provide information via text messages and through the Crime Stoppers Web site.

Already, more than 54 people have used the chat feature, nine to pass along tips.

Ken Shetter, executive director of the Safe City Commission, said the Web tool has already proved successful with the arrest of a high school student accused of selling pills.

"More and more, particularly with the younger generations,



Crime Time

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there are a lot of people who just prefer to communicate through the Internet," Shetter said. "We wanted to have choices for those people."

Shetter credits Jose Vicente Ortega, owner of Nexus Systems, with coming up with the Web chat idea.

"He's a creative, entrepreneurial thinker," Shetter said. "I ask him to always be thinking of ways we can take advantage of new technology. He pitched this idea to us."

Ortega said he thought up the idea for a Crime Stoppers chat after noticing there was no way for tip-takers to have a two-way conversation online. Ortega said he believes the system may glean more information from tipsters than a traditional phone conversation.

"I think people are a little more nervous when they're actual speaking to somebody," he said. "I think they're a lot more outgoing when they're having a chat conversation. There's that feeling that there's much more anonymity."

Tip-taker Iris Luna can attest to that. Luna said she has Web chatted as long as 30 minutes with a

Tipping off the police

Crime Stoppers offers reward money in exchange for information leading to an arrest. Ways to submit a Crime Stoppers tip are:

■ By phone at 817-469-TIPS (8477).

■ Through the group's Web site, www.469tips.com

■ Through a text message. Text "Tip117" plus your message to CRIMES (274637).

■ Though a Web chat. Click on "Chat" on the Crime Stoppers Web page, www.469tips.com

person who wanted to provide more information to a previously submitted tip.

"If they're more savvy with their fingers than their mouths, this would definitely be the avenue they would want to take," Luna said.

Luna said that while she has to rely on her note-taking abilities during a phone call, a Web chat allows her to simply cut and paste the text of the conversation into a form that can be submitted to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

"You're not missing anything," Luna said.

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