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Video Surveillance

One size does not fit all for loss prevention. BY BRYCE WITCHER

American business owners lose billions annually to crime-related incidents, and retail losses are impacted by ever increasing shoplifting volume. Large and small businesses need to be more alert than ever to problems that could ultimately devastate their business or lose customer and/or employee trust. According to a national retail security survey conducted by the University of Florida, since 2003 retailers attributed 47% of their inventory shrinkage to employee theft, equaling \$15.8 billion. In addition, the average shopping mall has over 100 car break-ins and 2 assaults during the busy November to December holiday season—a 50% increase over the previous months of the year.

As a business owner, these questions may arise: Could workplace violence happen inside or outside your business? Can vandals, liability situations or fire cause deep losses to your property? Are your employees stealing from you? Are your customers, or is your business at risk for robbery or other crimes? Retailers are asking these questions as they plan their risk mitigation programs, and property managers are responding.

Police say surveillance cameras, whether installed by businesses, property managers or local governments act as a powerful enforcement tool and crime deterrent. If the above figures and questions catch your attention as a business owner, you may want to consider looking into a surveillance system for your facility. Or, if you have one already, you may want to consider upgrading your current system. Either way, you must know what you need and how to get the most out of it to protect your assets.

SO, WHAT SURVEILLANCE OPTIONS ARE THERE?

While retail owners' surveillance options were once limited to closed-circuit TV, luckily the days of scratchy black and white images recorded on videotape are long gone. Advances in surveillance camera technology mean owners now have the option to choose between systems that range from the old black and whites up to digital technology that offers full-color, crystal-clear pictures, even in low light situations. In addition to the higher picture quality, some companies also offer web-based services that allow owners, security staff and even off-site law enforcement officials to view footage in real time as events occur. While there are certainly many more options than before, this also means choosing one can be confusing. However, like everything else, it really comes down to what your particular business needs are and what fits your budget.

ANALOG (CCTV)

TRADITIONAL SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM

If you have limited surveillance needs, i.e., you only need to have one or two fixed cameras recording one or two areas (say, the cash register and front door), you may choose to go with an analog system. This might be a closed-circuit television system transmitting video to a limited



Security cameras that are exposed to the elements should be housed in weatherproof (and sometimes bulletproof) enclosures.

number of monitors using coaxial cables, and recording to a VHS cassette or even a DVR (digital video recorder). Although this can be a seemingly inexpensive option, it does have its drawbacks, as significant manual intervention is needed. When recording to a VHS video tape you have to remember to change and store them. There are physical storage space considerations for the cassettes (think bookshelves full of old security tapes). A DVR solves the problems cassette storage present by recording video onto what essentially amounts to a hard drive. Also, even though analog cameras themselves might be cheaper, the overall cost of installation can be more expensive. You must factor in the cost of coaxial cable, monitors, switches, VCR or DVR, and multiplexers. Price-wise, you can buy an analog system for fairly cheap, with kit solutions available for well under \$1,000.

Although the original quality of video image is not usually a problem, one downside to an analog system is that if you use a VCR, you can only view recorded footage from a video cassette which can degrade with time and use. Retrieving the sequence that you want can be difficult and time consuming. Again, many DVRs address this challenge by allowing the user to go directly to the video segment they want. Other disadvantages include the need for on-site configuration and operation, and difficulty of scalability. It should be noted that while manufacturers still service the older analog surveillance market, there has been a major shift toward using digital cameras and recording devices.

WEBCAM

SURVEILLANCE ON YOUR PC

Although not designed for this purpose, another less robust option for surveillance is to employ a webcam. Realistically, a webcam is really more of a communication tool rather than a true surveillance system, but allows you to check in on employee activity now and then. This is a sometimes complicated but cost-effective solution for those owners looking to casually monitor a limited amount of area. This type of system uses a camera connected to a PC via a USB or wireless connection. Video

can either be recorded on that PC or transmitted to other PC on the network.

With a webcam system, you can access video via a PC that has specific software installed. You can buy a webcam and security software at any given electronics store, ranging from as little as \$50 and on up into the hundreds. The software allows you to record video much like any recording device would. This definitely seems to present a clear advantage over an analog system in cost, convenience, and storage considerations.

One disadvantage to using a webcam system is that you can only access the recorded video from the PC that has the specific software installed, and you may need to continuously upgrade your software. Remote accessibility can be difficult to configure. Unless you know how to make your PC available from outside your network, you will only be able to access your system in person. In addition, the picture quality of a wireless webcam system can be fairly low, appearing grainy and choppy.



Intervention specialists watch security camera feeds and respond to each event with appropriate action.

IP CAMERA (NETWORK CAMERA)

LIVE VS. REWIND

The latest technology available to business owners is IP (Internet Protocol) camera, also known as network camera. This type of camera allows video hosting and real-time remote surveillance. The system makes use of rugged IP-enabled cameras that are accessible from a PC, PDA, or cell phone. This type of Internet-based system allows for live access locally and remotely by simultaneous, multiple viewers. It also allows secure, online recording and storage of footage. That means that wherever you are, you can log into your account from any Internet-enabled device and view your property in real time, as well as after the fact. This allows an off-site surveillance team to watch your property

Issues to Consider When Implementing a Live Remote Surveillance System or Service

- Can I use my existing analog CCTV cameras?
- Should I invest in good-quality network cameras?
- Should my cameras be stationary or movable (PTZ - pan-tilt-zoom)?
- Which cameras need to be watched? How many hours per day?
- What kind of daily reporting or audit trail comes with the service?
- How do I want to access my cameras' recorded video?
- Do I need 7 days, 14 days or more of recorded video at all times?
- Do I need this video to protect against losses or false injury claims?
- If choosing an online solution, what frame rate and resolution do I need? Is one frame per second adequate when I can see more of the event at 6 frames per second.
- How can I permanently keep archives of selected events?
- Does my offsite surveillance team have the ability to call the police if something happens on my property?
- Can multiple first responders (i.e. police or fire department) access my cameras at the same time without having degradation in video quality?
- Does the service use a data center? If so, how secure is it?

and react in whatever capacity is needed. Think of it as a virtual security guard.

One of the obvious benefits of using live vs. rewind surveillance is that you can deter the crime before it happens, or have law enforcement catch criminals in the act. The benefits of having cameras watched by actual human eyes rather than relying upon after-the-fact recordings of older security systems can be measured in the quality solutions that live surveillance can provide. With an IP-based system, retail operators don't have to rely on motion-activated alarms to know that something is happening or has already occurred. Instead, live virtual guards can watch as events including theft, violence, fire or vandalism unfold and they can act accordingly on an owner's behalf. In addition, IP-based systems give owners the ability to add more cameras if necessary very easily.

This new technology has changed the way businesses protect themselves by enhancing, and even in some cases replacing traditional guard services, reducing both staffing costs and other related security costs. Using a remote surveillance service provider can even give you the flexibility to view your cameras whenever and wherever you want. "I enjoy the convenience of checking on my entire facility not only from my office, but also from home or any other location where I can access the Internet," says Charlie Sanders, Branch Manager of Insurance Auto Auction in Phoenix.

ASSESS YOUR SURVEILLANCE NEEDS.

MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

The bottom line is that whether you own a single retail shop or a whole chain of shopping malls, video surveillance can make a significant improvement to your peace of mind and your bottom line. New technologies and improved equipment have revolutionized the way retail professionals work with loss prevention, store optimization, fraud detection, security and customer service and safety. Although there are various choices out there for retail business owners, it is imperative that each one determines what their true security needs are. While many options are less expensive, as with anything else, you get what you pay for. And in the long run, going without a surveillance system, or choosing the cheapest option may cost your business far more than you want to pay.

RFB

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