

The ROI of Managed Video Services: Reduced Costs and Improved Security

It seems like a contradictory statement: Reduce your security costs and improve your level of security for your customers, employees, and property. By leveraging managed video services, businesses can accomplish both of these goals because at its heart, this fast-growing approach to security is about more effective utilization of existing resources. With savvy use of video surveillance technology, security teams can do more with less, resulting in a rapid and demonstrable Return-On-Investment (ROI). “Manned guards are a proven industry and people are sometimes apprehensive to try new technology,” says Ewan Lamont, an analyst at IMS Research, who has extensively studied the economics of video surveillance as a service. “With budgets being squeezed, the ROI of remote guarding is fantastic. When you see that people are reducing costs by half, it’s kind of hard to see why everyone isn’t taking it up.”



Evolution of Video Surveillance

When video surveillance systems first appeared, their purpose was to simply observe and record a known event such as a hold-up. Technology advances, including better cameras, analytics, and IP protocols, are opening up the proactive capabilities of video surveillance and providing the opportunity to decrease costs through remote monitoring and managed services. Managed video services leverage the increasingly popular approach of “software as a service” (SaaS), also known as “cloud computing.” You can’t open a business or technology magazine without encountering these terms, yet many people remain confused about what they mean.

SaaS is a business model where software is run and data is managed on a remote server operated by a third party. This approach has spread across the business landscape for everything from email to payroll services because the economics make so much sense. With SaaS, a company is relieved of the burdens of paying for expensive infrastructure, managing software upgrades, and ensuring its system will be scalable and flexible in the future. The vendor becomes responsible for all those elements and costs. The companies that use SaaS benefit from the provider’s ability to provide economies of scale, leaving a business to focus their time, money, and resources on things that give them a competitive advantage rather than security surveillance technology.

Many Roles of Remotely Managed Security

In the security arena, the SaaS model has proven very successful for card access readers, so video was the next logical progression. With video surveillance as a service, many duties that had been handled by live guards can now be transferred to trained security professionals who can monitor a business via installed video cameras from a centralized, remote location. This has helped to deliver a significant ROI over actual guards who must be paid for full shifts.

For example, security professionals at a remote facility

can monitor a scheduled delivery before or after hours, relieving the company of paying employee overtime, or distracting employees or managers from a busy retail selling floor. With two-way audio capabilities, the monitoring center can also provide instructions to delivery personnel. Remote monitoring can also be used to observe maintenance crews, vending machine servicing, and functions that might otherwise require the attention of a guard or busy manager. Because the company participates in the strategic placement of the video surveillance cameras, the security professionals located at the remote center are able to monitor specified locations both inside and outside facilities.

To help increase employee safety, remote video monitoring can provide employees with a “video escort” to or from their vehicle and throughout a facility. After contacting the remote monitoring service via their own cell phone, an employee can maintain audio contact with a security professional while being observed moving from one location to another. They can even be accompanied from an outside parking lot through the front door, down stairwells and hallways, and into a highly secure location, giving employee peace-of-mind, especially when the facility is located in a high-risk area.

This solution has proven extremely reliable and cost effective for many organizations. The Port of Wilmington, Delaware, for example, secured approval to have security professionals remotely “escort” visitors at their facility using its existing closed-circuit TV system, therefore maintaining compliance with government regulations.

More Targeted Coverage

Another significant reason why managed video services are gaining momentum is the realization that security staffs’ time is often not fully utilized. “Guarding is a lot of standing around and waiting for stuff to happen; there might be two alerts within an eight-hour shift,” Lamont notes. “Managed video security services are one way to cost effectively cover the two or three alerts that occur on a number of sites.”

Every business wants to provide a secure environment for the employee who is responsible for unlocking or locking a facility at the open/close of business. Lamont notes, “The employee is vulnerable for 10 minutes when they open in the morning and for 10 minutes when they are locking up at night. It would be inefficient to employ a guard just to stand next to them for those 20 minutes.”

Managed video services allow the same level of security but in a more targeted way. “Instead of paying an actual guard for a full shift to make periodic checks around a facility,” says Lamont, “a trained security professional can perform regularly scheduled video surveillance sweeps at specific times during the day or night, essentially performing the same duties as the actual guard.” And just as with a physical guard, these virtual guard tours can perform scripted audio announcements to alert employees that they are being observed. This service ensures that a company maintains a consistent security posture.

Some companies had found that remote video monitoring works more effectively than manned guards. In the February 11, 2010 issue of *Security Sales & Integration*, Brian Fader, owner of a Mercedes-

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Benz dealership, says he stopped employing security guards because they were unreliable. Since then he has relied on interactive surveillance to cover his car dealership around the clock. "This certainly gives us better coverage," he says.

Now that audio can run over the same network as video rather than traditional phone lines, security professionals at the remote monitoring center can speak with loiterers or criminals, alerting them that their actions are being viewed and/or recorded. When a panic button is installed, employees can press it whenever they feel uncomfortable in a situation. Upon receiving the alarm signal, security professionals begin visually monitoring the situation immediately. "If they see something going on, they can make an announcement over the loudspeaker while they are calling the police," Fader says. "It's a huge deterrent."

Pay-As-Needed

As Lamont of IMS notes, "99% of the time a situation will be resolved by a guard just telling someone to move on, or telling kids they can't skateboard here". He points out, "That is another job that only takes a couple of minutes," and managed video services allow those security resources to be used — and paid for — only as needed. "Listening/talking and remote monitoring in general allows one person to do those two or three ten-minute security requirements for a number of facilities without having to pay a guard for eight hours for an entire shift," he says. If there is a security breach, the security professional at the monitoring center can alert the authorities quickly, instead of waiting for an on-site guard to get to a phone. And, management and local authorities can be provided with video of an "event" situation for further prosecution efforts. In the case of an ongoing security crisis, remote security managers can help police by directing customers or employees to secure areas. By reviewing existing security practices and determining what situations require a constant "eyes-on" presence, businesses can determine when and where remote video monitoring makes the most cost effective sense.

About ADT

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