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Considerations for Surveillance System Design For the Restaurant Industry

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Introduction

You probably receive calls from various surveillance vendors on a weekly, if not more frequent, basis. Perhaps your company is finally putting together a new video surveillance initiative; and you may be wondering what you should be asking, what you should be expecting, and what you should make sure you are getting. This paper will outline areas of consideration when designing a surveillance initiative for either a single store or large enterprise. We will also identify some commonly made mistakes while deciding on a surveillance package.

Operational consideration

Let's face it, theft deterrence is only one source of ROI for surveillance. Procuring video surveillance for identifying perpetrators of burglary and robbery only addresses a nominal portion of LP concerns and doesn't leverage your investment to its fullest potential. Often times, criminal activities at restaurants are conducted by people wearing uniforms and name tags. Today, surveillance is used in such fields as training, quality control, customer service, and cash handling standards, as well safety, and security. Operators have discovered that surveillance can be a powerful tool in maintaining a safe, efficient, and profitable restaurant.

Drive-Thru

An important operational concern that can be addressed in part by surveillance is drive-thru management. The use of outdoor cameras and LCD displays to view and assess the drive-thru lines allows for management decisions to be made in real time. There is a great deal of data that shows a direct correlation between reducing drive-thru times and strengthened customer loyalty, which ultimately results in increased revenues.

A typical configuration might include outdoor cameras for viewing the line or stack and menu board, an additional camera for capturing license plate data, and another for driver identification. An indoor camera at the presentation window would generally include the use of a varifocal lens and the overlay of the POS integration. An audio kit can also be used to help monitor customer service and order accuracy.

Reducing drive-thru times remains an important operational concern and video surveillance is a key tool for addressing it.

Freezer/Cooler

Another operational concern is freezer/cooler activity. Aside from the more obvious LP concerns in the freezer, often employees consider this a safe place for unauthorized behavior. It has been identified as an area of risk for theft, drug use, sexual harassment, and false “slip and fall” and worker’s comp cases.

This can easily be addressed with the use of a moisture resistant infrared camera inside the freezer. Employees are encouraged to behave appropriately in the cooler when they are on camera.

Preparation Areas

Adding camera coverage to the prep area can assist in ensuring proper food preparation and safe food handling at a restaurant. It is also useful for controlling and reducing food costs.

Point-of-Sale (POS)

POS is yet another critical area of concern. This is the point of payment, and the first opportunity for crew members to mishandle cash. It is also the usual venue for interfacing with the customer (i.e. during order taking). Typically, each POS terminal would be covered by a camera; and, ideally, this camera would have a varifocal lens to allow the installation technician adjustability in setting focal length. In addition, each camera would have the POS data integrated with the video. Audio would also be used to monitor customer service, up-selling, and transaction totals. An additional camera would provide overall coverage of the POS area.

Safe and Office

The back office is where the money is counted and stored - and often where it goes missing. It’s also where we see opportunities for time theft and other inappropriate employee behavior. For these reasons, it is necessary to have camera coverage in the office. Ideal camera coverage would keep the safe and desk clearly visible. Some sites use covert cameras such as a smoke detector camera to cover the office so that it is not evident to employees.

Dumpster and Backdoor

There are a lot of important cameras that are often forgotten such as the play area, parking lot, drink station, and entrances and exits, but one of the most important is often seen as less necessary and that’s the backdoor and dumpster area. It is critical for any LP plan to include a camera at the backdoor to view the identities of individuals coming in and out, as well as deliveries, but also for activities that occur in this area. Smoke breaks, drug use, time theft, sexual harassment, and even fights all too often occur without raising alarm simply by stepping outside. What about all items going out the door? Are the boxes being removed empty? Are they going into the dumpster? Are things being removed from the dumpster later after closing, and if they are being removed from the dumpster, in what car are they being driven off? All of this can be captured with surveillance.

A comprehensive backdoor configuration would include backdoor contact triggers. There are basically I/O contacts that send a signal back to the DVR allowing a video clip to be marked for later review, as well as an alert sent. In some cases a backdoor report can be created listing these events for easy review.

Leveraging Special Features

Today's surveillance systems have a gamut of special features that can provide tremendous benefits to operators. Below, is an explanation of some of these features.

1. **POS Integration:** This is the process of integrating and correlating POS data with video. This allows the user to search POS events and view the videos associated with them. POS integration is an important part of any LP plan. Searches can be made on voids or no sales. Clock-ins and police discounts can be easily verified by searching and clicking on the video links provided in the search results.
2. **Audio:** A properly placed audio kit can provide incredible insight into your customers' experiences and your employees' up-selling skills. Audio pays for itself when it's used to ensure employees are up-selling.
3. **Public View monitor:** These are used at the drive-thru to view the line as well as in the dining area to make entrants aware they are on camera.
4. **Outdoor cameras:** Besides the drive-thru, outdoor cameras can be used to prevent loitering and vandalism. They also act as a deterrent from other criminal activities.
5. **Covert Cameras:** These are used to conceal a cameras location.
6. **Infrared Cameras:** These are self-illuminating and therefore usable in low light areas.
7. **Alerts:** Be alerted of POS events, back door or safe openings, and more. Alerts can be sent via email or SMS message.
8. **I/O Triggers:** These can be configured to send alerts or produce reports on things like back door activities, safe openings, etc.
9. **Motion Detection:** Motion detection can be configured to act as a trigger for recording, or alerts and can greatly decrease hard drive usage.

Operators would deploy these defenses while at the same time using other policies to enforce correct actions. For example, a policy could be created mandating that all boxes that are removed from the site be collapsed to ensure only emptied boxes are being taken out the back door. Back door reporting with

an I/O trigger would make quickly auditing these events as simple as clicking a link or viewing an SMS text message.

Some common mistakes

1. **Bandwidth:** The better your bandwidth, the better the quality of remote viewing. Period. Bandwidth requirements should be part of your surveillance discussions. There is a chance you will need to make at least some small upgrade in internet speed.
2. **Reluctance to Use Audio:** Audio is incredibly powerful. Employees who know they are being recorded also know they have to up-sell. Some operators have been reluctant due to laws regarding recording audio. The truth is, laws do vary, but operators should check with their legal department since in most places the warning stickers that installers post at the entrance is enough to be compliant.
3. **No Training:** Operators should insist they have comprehensive training included with their surveillance package. DOO's and Managers benefit greatly from using the features of a comprehensive system. They should also have training. Reaping the benefits of the system is predicated on knowing how to use it.
4. **Minimal Coverage:** By far the most common mistake in system design is not having enough coverage. It is understandable that an enterprise would look to get the most out of every camera. Unfortunately, this often means a reduction of cameras, and trying to get one camera to do the work of two or more. For example, we would like to have an identifiable shot of each person who comes through the door; we also need shots of the dining room in its entirety as well as the fountain area. A frugal operator might try to get all this coverage from one camera, and generally, it requires at least two if not three. This results in an inability to properly identify the faces of those who enter, and perhaps missing the area where an unscrupulous patron lays down and claims he slipped over spilled soda. Surveillance at its most basic level needs proper coverage to ensure a significant return on investment.

We have discussed only some of the benefits that can be leveraged from a comprehensive surveillance package. Surveillance has a high potential for significant return on investment compared to other technologies, yet is sometimes overlooked by operators.

Conclusion

Operators can monitor multiple sites from one screen. Stores can easily be audited for store cleanliness remotely and maintain enforcement of proper safety measures such as wet floor signs and unobstructed back doors. Searches and reports can be set up on items such as voids, employee meals, and police discounts. Managers and owners can easily search events and make decisions as they happen.

When designing your system, make a list of all your areas of concern. They can be anything at all. Then list how a camera system might be used to aid in these areas. You would be absolutely surprised how many operational issues can be addressed with surveillance.