

PROTECTING YOUR PROFITABILITY:

How new camera surveillance technology equates to less hassle and bigger payoffs for C-store owners and managers.

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Owning and/or operating an individual or chain of c-stores can be a rewarding career and worthy investment. However, in today's economy it can also be filled with more stress and uncertainty than ever before. Serious concerns about the negative impact high gas prices may have on in-store sales are causing some sleepless nights for many owners.

Beyond current economic factors, there are other serious concerns that can keep an owner/operator awake at night; risks that can adversely affect their employees, customers, reputation and profitability, including:

- ✓ Shrinkage Due To Employee, Vendor and Customer Theft
- ✓ Violence, Crime and Vandalism
- ✓ Fraudulent Workers Compensation Claims
- ✓ Non-Conformance to Safety Guidelines
- ✓ On-The-Job Drug and Alcohol Use
- ✓ Lack Of Employee Productivity

Not sure these risk factors truly exist in the c-store industry or specifically your business? Consider the following:

- In the recent FBI study "2006 Crime In The United States", a good portion of the study was dedicated to identifying where robberies are most likely to occur. Gas/Service Stations and Convenience Stores accounted for 8.3% of all robbery locations. No other retail type of businesses even made the list.
- If you thought the primary source of shrinkage came from your customers shoplifting, think again. According to The *Global Retail Theft Barometer 2007*, shrink was caused first and foremost by employees (46%), followed

by shoplifters (32%) administrative (16%) and lastly vendors (5%). According to the *National Retail Federation*, retail losses hit \$41.6 billion in 2006. The majority of this is attributed to employee theft.

- Not all employees will look to earn their raise, and many look to get paid while not working, all at your expense. Fraudulent workers compensation claims cost US businesses \$5 billion annually, as found by the National Insurance Crime Bureau.
- 75% of drug users are employed. These users cost their employers twice as much in medical and workers' compensation expenses, according to the *U.S. Department of Health & Human Services*.

Clearly, there are a myriad of risk factors that may have a detrimental impact on the well-being of the store's employees, customers, reputation and profitability. How does a c-store owner/operator protect their bottom line?

One of the most effective tools to quell risks is camera surveillance systems.

Historically, these solutions have been used to varying degrees of success, in large part due to the technology utilized for many legacy systems. The systems weren't easy-to-use and the only

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time you could view live camera images or previously recorded material was while you were at the store. Plus, the images weren't all that clear. Fortunately, for the owners of older systems and those considering this business tool for the first time, there is good news.

Times have changed.

For camera surveillance systems over four or five years old, the technological advances that exist today warrant a fresh look at how this tool can be used as a mission critical component of a c-store operation. If a store has somehow "gotten by" so far without implementing a camera surveillance system, now is the time to re-evaluate that decision. Many new camera surveillance system owners don't believe what they've been missing when it comes to the risk factors outlined above.

What's Improved?

Let's review some of the key areas in which recent leaps in technology have vastly improved the overall effectiveness of these systems and how they can better assure your profitability remains intact.

It's in the DVR!

The Digital Video Recorder (DVR) is the heart of any good quality camera surveillance system. Replacing the continuously recording VCR of olden days and even first generation DVR's, this component does much more than record video evidence. How would you like to view real-time what your surveillance cameras are seeing, from any computer that has a high speed internet connection? How about viewing previously recorded incidents that occurred earlier in the day, overnight last night or weeks ago? You can now do that from your home office or anywhere remotely, and it is all a function of the DVR. Want to download that recorded incident to share with police or for use in court? With a few simple mouse clicks, you can burn that video to a CD, DVD or flash drive and share it as needed.

The images cameras capture are recorded on the DVR's hard drive, in digital format. Because hard drive quality and capacity is at an all time high and their prices are at an all time low, having enough storage capacity should never be an issue. 500 gigabytes or more of storage capacity is commonplace today. The DVR can be a standalone unit, reside on your computer network, and even interface with your point-of-sale cash register system. In a future article, we will get more in depth about the different capabilities, aspects and settings within the DVR.

No Computer Experts Needed

Today's systems are intuitive and extremely user-friendly. Users can point-and-click their way to success with today's systems and their familiar graphical user interfaces (GUI). Whether it's accessing live or previously recorded video or fine tuning the recording settings for a camera focused on one of your cash registers, doing so within the system is easily within everyone's capabilities.

I Can See Clearly Now

Users of newer camera security systems are often astonished by the vibrant, clear images they produce. This is a result of gains in camera technology, as well as within the DVR. Today's cameras have superior optics and image sensor (chip) technology. What was considered a high end 1/4" image sensor four to six years ago has been replaced with larger, top-of-the-line image sensors in most quality cameras. The result is more light and color being captured and processed by the camera. Advances in DVR technology, specifically with frames and images per second recording and playback capabilities means that more is being done with the high quality image the camera is capturing.

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Other capabilities that were once only found in high-end cameras have made their way down to the middle market as well. A good example of this is a camera's capability to capture a detailed image such as a license plate. Inventive solutions include cameras placed in a low level speed bump which captures the front and rear license plate as vehicles pull up to the fuel island. Other impressive gains have been made in covert cameras; it is truly amazing how you can now get such a high quality image from a lens a little larger than a pinhead.

What's more, all of the technological advances made are available at extremely attractive prices. Not unlike any other business tool that is technology-centric, as time passes and more advances are made prices often remain static or fall.

Keep in mind that not all camera surveillance systems are created equal. Even with advancements, not all cameras, DVR's and other components are worthy of consideration. Regardless of great technology, if a proper risk assessment and needs analysis are not performed, the system has little chance of being engineered correctly to be the reliable solution you need.

C-store owners are encouraged to make sure they aren't fooled by the employee, customer or vendor who is looking to reach into their pocket. Nor by the criminal who sees the business without a system as an easy target. Camera surveillance systems are positioned to be the mission critical business tool that helps protect your employees, customers, reputation and profitability. Now they are better and more affordable than ever.

Gary Swearingen has been promoting the effective utilization of technology-based solutions for over 15 years. He specializes in helping businesses reap the benefits of digital video surveillance systems utilizing risk assessments and business needs analysis to develop customized solutions that deliver results. He can be reached at 937-293-1177 or via email at gswearingen@adsecurity.biz.



Advanced Digital Security, Inc.

Established in 2004, Advanced Digital Security provides businesses with comprehensive digital video surveillance solutions to effectively mitigate the risks that adversely affect profitability.

Advanced Digital Security develops customized surveillance solutions based on professional risk assessments performed at each facility or business location before customized solutions are developed.

An expansive array of surveillance system components, including digital video recorders, medium- and high-resolution cameras, and LCD and flat-panel televisions and monitors, are available. Key relationships with top manufacturers allows ADS to provide the best-of-breed products at highly competitive prices.

Our solutions are implemented in a wide variety of businesses, including schools, retail and convenience stores, gas stations, hotels, restaurants and manufacturers. We are experienced in implementing surveillance systems of all sizes, from small to medium-sized projects to large scale installations designed to monitor multiple stores, office locations and campuses.