School makes security a priority with an A+ solution.

Washington Community High School saves hours of searching through video and diminishes false alarms with a full Axis surveillance system.

Organization:
Washington Community High School

Location:
Washington, Illinois, USA

Industry segment:
Education

Application:
Safety and security

Axis partner:
The Kern Group

Mission

Located in Washington, Illinois, Washington Community High School (WCHS) makes up the entirety of Central Illinois School District 308. As the school has grown, its security needs have also expanded to the point where its existing surveillance system was no longer adequate to address problems at the school. The system was difficult to use and generated a large number of false alarms, among other issues. The outdated, cobbled-together analog cameras from multiple manufacturers left gaps in coverage, opening WCHS to potential liability. After performing a security audit, the school decided to upgrade to an IP video system using equipment from a single manufacturer that would deliver improved quality, coverage and ease of use.

Solution

Partnering with The Kern Group of Peoria, WCHS opted for a video system from Axis Communications. From the 72 total cameras installed on the interior and exterior of

the school and two network video recorders to ancillary products such as IR illuminators and surge protectors, the system is a 100 percent Axis solution, allowing the school to take advantage of the benefits of using a single provider from end to end. The cameras were deployed in and around the expanding school campus, with video recording 24/7.

Result

In terms of quality and ease of use, the Axis solution has offered immediate benefits. Rather than spending an hour reviewing analog video to find five minutes' worth of relevant footage, the school's security officer can quickly find incidents on video and see exactly what happened, allowing him to address them immediately. The new system is also incredibly user-friendly, allowing new users to get up to speed quickly.

AXIS®
COMMUNICATIONS

Solving security challenges for improved safety of students, staff and visitors

Located six miles east of Peoria in the town of Washington, Illinois, Washington Community High School (WCHS) is also the only school in Illinois School District 308. The student population of 1,384 is evenly spaced across grades nine through 12. The school offers a diverse curriculum, and recently expanded its footprint, with additional projects planned to accommodate its growing student body. With that growth comes an increase in potential security and safety issues, which has included students throwing objects in the cafeteria, passing unknown objects to each other and vaping in hallways.

With a patchwork surveillance system consisting of outdated analog cameras and recorders from multiple manufacturers, WCHS found that its solution was incapable of addressing its safety and security needs today and into the future. Further complicating the problem was the level of difficulty to locate recorded video when an incident occurred. This required School Resource Officer Troi Westbrook to undertake a time-consuming process that delayed the investigation. Once located, there was also no guarantee the low-quality analog video would offer any insight into who had been involved in the event or any other details to help resolve the matter.

"Retrieving video was difficult in that I had to have a lot of downtime because in many cases, I would have to review video in real time," Westbrook said. "That was the biggest headache with the old system, having to spend an hour to find five minutes' worth of video, often for very minor things."

Faced with a variety of safety and security issues, the poor image quality combined with a lack of coverage in some key areas left the school open to potential liability for incidents.

Prioritizing security

Given the drawbacks of its old system and the increasing importance of school security, WCHS undertook a security audit, which led to the decision to upgrade to an IP-based system that would provide them with the quality, coverage and ease of use needed to secure the school.

"In today's world we have to put security as one of our top priorities, so we did an audit to look at what we had with our current system and determine where we could improve upon that," said Joseph Sander, Assistant Superintendent of School District 308.

Even before the audit, it was clear that the low quality of the video was a major problem, along with a lack of user-friendliness and the fact that the system comprised equipment from multiple manufacturers, all of which created problems that were difficult for the school to solve in a timely manner.

"As the owner of the system, we have to be able to make decisions and changes without waiting for a contractor to come in and fix or reprogram things," Sander said. "In security situations, you don't have that luxury of time. We need to always be at the ready and we weren't with the old system."

Identifying the solution

WCHS contracted The Kern Group of Peoria, who performed its own threat analysis to identify security needs, including points of entry, in light of the school's history and the types of incidents it had faced in the past. Using that information, Kern identified end-to-end solutions from Axis Communications as the best path forward for the school.
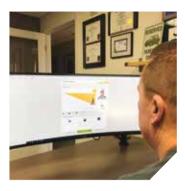
Based on the results of its threat assessment, Kern Group used AXIS Site Designer to lay out what cameras would be installed in each specific location to provide maximum coverage.

WCHS utilizes a 100% Axis solution including illuminators, housings and recorders.

AXIS Site Designer allowed The Kern Group to determine the ideal camera models and placement.

> "From day one of the installation, it was night and day compared to our previous system as far as the quality and control capabilities. I knew right then that we had made the right decision."

Ron Ehlers, Network Administrator, Washington Community High School.

"AXIS Site Designer worked flawlessly. We presented the school with CAD drawings in a way that is easy to understand with different icons and colors that represent different cameras, showing where they will be installed," said Greg Kern, an Axis Certified Professional and Managing Partner of The Kern Group.

The first in a multi-step process was to upgrade the video surveillance solution at WCHS. Recognizing the drawbacks of the school's cobbled-together system, Kern recommended building the new system using solely Axis products, from cameras, recorders and AXIS Camera Station video management software to housings and more.

Because school budgets are often tight, Kern wanted to put decision-makers at ease about their investment in the new system. Working with Axis, the firm delivered a proof of concept by demonstrating a variety of cameras to show WCHS leadership and the school board real-time video from the exact type of cameras that would be installed onsite.

"It was incredibly helpful to have Axis come down and visit the school to give us an actual presentation of what the video would look like live. That was a very useful way for us to see what we were actually purchasing before it was installed," Sander said.

In all, Kern deployed 72 Axis network cameras in the building and around the school's campus, including AXIS Q3708-PVE Network Cameras to replace analog perimeter cameras, and AXIS Q3709-PVE cameras to monitor the parking lots. Interior coverage included hallways, common areas, perimeter doors and the school's gymnasium. For recording, Kern selected two AXIS S1048 Mk II Recorders. Rather than incurring the expense of installing new pole lighting, Kern chose to use AXIS T90D30 IR-LED illuminators to aid with night vision.

Recognizing that no one camera can fit all applications, Kern selected camera models for the specific locations where they would be installed based on their individual feature sets. The firm also chose Axis accessories, including mounting brackets, surge protectors and cabling to further customize each installed camera and ensure optimal performance.

"It's much easier to deal with one manufacturer for as much of the products as possible. It makes everything flow better if we have one manufacturer that we're going to deal with for everything," said Scott Kern, Managing Director, Kern Group.

Increased efficiency and security

The completed system allows Westbrook to receive alerts and images on his phone if someone enters a restricted area at a particular time. Previously, there was no way to verify these events generated by the intrusion detection system, leading to the large number of false alarms that plagued the school's existing system.

"The number of false alarms in our school district became numbing, and numb is a term you don't want to use in safety and security," Sander said. "We haven't had any problems in that area since putting in the Axis system."

Another improvement has been Westbrook's ability to access video more quickly using AXIS Camera Station video management software and an AXIS S9002 Desktop Terminal, which has freed him up to spend more time monitoring the school for potential problems.

"It's performed much better than the former system and it's saved me a lot of time, probably several hours," Westbrook said. "Also, the quality is not even comparable to the previous system. I'm able to see farther distances in much more detail, so there's no question about what I'm seeing in the video."

Looking to the future

In conjunction with another expansion planned, WCHS will also be upgrading its access control systems, which currently consist of technologies that are no longer supported by the manufacturer. Based on the experience with Axis, the school plans to implement the company's physical access control solutions to ensure even integration between the two systems.

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About Axis Communications

Axis enables a smarter and safer world by creating network solutions that provide insights for improving security and new ways of doing business. As the industry leader in network video, Axis offers products and services for video surveillance and analytics, access control, and audio systems. Axis has more than 3,000 dedicated employees in over 50 countries and collaborates with partners worldwide to deliver customer solutions. Axis was founded in 1984 and has its headquarters in Lund, Sweden.

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