Case Study
Miami Beach Parking Structures

Video Surveillance System Provides Record of Accidents, Vandalism and Thefts

Solution: Infinova Cameras and DVRs

How Miami Beach Cut Liabilities at Parking Structures

The City of Miami Beach Parking Department handles street and lot parking throughout the City, including six multi-level garages. As with all parking structures, public or private, they create liability issues. Cars get vandalized, there are accidents and vehicles get stolen. When any of these things happen, it's the parking garage owner who typically takes the blame.

"The primary reason the Miami Beach Parking Department installed surveillance systems at their garages was to create a documentation system to offset liability claims. However, a secondary use in Miami Beach is to monitor employees, assuring that they are providing the city's citizens with prompt and courteous service," reports Vincent Vento, CEO of ATC International Communications (ACTi), a Miami-based security integrator with projects throughout the southeastern United States and Latin America.

In the U.S., ACTi has customers such as the Shingle Creek Resort and the Ocean One and Ocean Two luxury high rise developments, whose ads are recognized by readers of in-flight publications. In Latin America, projects include Sersaprosa, Central America's largest armed car carrier, Dell Computer Call Centers and Microsoft's Latin American offices.

According to Vento, the Parking Department has management staff in each garage using the surveillance system on a real-time basis to watch over employees working the ticket booths. They want to assure that their employees are interacting with parking garage customers in a friendly and cordial manner.

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Cutting Liabilities

"It is very important that the Parking Department can document every car that enters and leaves the structure, as well as the driver," Vento explains. "To act as a deterrent, we don't hide the cameras. We want them to be visible. As a result, the Department has dramatically reduced car theft and shrunk vandalism incidents.

"There are three basic strategies we use when placing cameras in a parking structure," Vento informs. "First of all, at each entrance and exit, the surveillance system needs to capture images of the car, the license plate and the face of the driver, going both in and out of the garage. The recorded images provide a record of who was driving the car, a great help in determining claims of theft. And, if there truly was a theft, the system captures the face of the perpetrator.

"Secondly, cameras need to cover all main driveways in and out on all floors," Vento says. "It's at the turn points where most accidents occur. With the recorded video, there is documentation of who was at fault, a great help to careful drivers and their insurance companies.

"Lastly, cameras need to be recording video on all down ramps," Vento adds. "This is where the majority of vandalism incidents occur. With a clear image of the perpetrator, law enforcement is provided a tool to find and convict the vandal.

"We're using Infinova analog cameras at the parking structures," Vento says, "for several reasons. Analog is being used because the original implementation was installed when analog was really the only way to go. At present, budgets don't allow us to upgrade to digital. However, we're prepared to do so since we've installed Infinova encoders and decoders on the cameras to provide digital signals.

"Also, in anticipation of future expansion to digital, the analog cameras are using CAT 5 cabling to the Infinova servers," Vento adds. "When we ultimately add IP cameras, there will be no additional transmission costs.

"Other key issues we faced were those of extended recording as well as the quality of the recordings" Vento explains. "Again, when the Department ultimately updates to IP, we want to be able to keep using the same equipment, protecting their investment. To help us convince the Parking Department that we had selected the right equipment and vendor, we had the perfect reference account, the Miami Dade County Schools, a $25 million a year plus user of Infinova equipment.

"They told the Parking Department that, they too, needed a high level of reliability," Vento remembers. "They emphasized that if and when there was a problem, such as a malfunctioning DVR, that Infinova's advanced replacement policy and rapid equipment turnaround kept their system up and running. Upon speaking with their school district peers, the Parking Department management felt good about our choice."

One problem that ATCi and the Parking Department didn't face was that of lighting, oftentimes a challenge in parking structures.

"The Miami Beach Parking Department is a very progressive organization," Vento emphasizes. "Although the garages were built in the late 50's and early 60's, we avoided the typical dark industrial-cement lighting problems of such structures because the garages have been painted an off-white to leverage all light sources, both natural and from their upgraded lighting systems. It's an idea that we would encourage all parking structure operators to emulate."

Transmitting & Storing the Images

"Our Infinova servers are set up so that they can be connected to a Storage Area Network (SAN) in the garage," Vento advances. "Thus, images are transmitted from the cameras to the servers via CAT 5 cabling which connects to the SAN via CAT 6 cabling. These SANs can hold a tremendous amount of recorded data. For instance, the average garage has 107 cameras. The SAN will store 120 days of recorded images at 7 fps. Four months is more than enough time to hold recordings for any reasonable, potential claim."

In the near future, all cameras will send video to a centralized monitoring system and all data will be stored at one site. Garage to garage transmission will be via fiber and/or wireless systems which the City already has installed.

Today and On to Tomorrow
"The Miami Beach Parking Department is a very happy customer," Vento relates. "They have fast access to their recorded data which they use to evaluate different situations. They can quickly determine who the perpetrator was and what happened prior to the event. Using the same system, they can also evaluate employee performance."

Vento loves to tell the story of one search soon after the installation was complete. "This is such a South Beach story," he says. "In the parking garage on the roof level in South Beach, the cameras caught a guy in his yellow Corvette burning rubber up and down the driveway as though he was on the local drag strip. However, by the time Security got upstairs, he had sped away and out of the garage. Of course, the cameras had captured what the car looked like, its license plate and the face of the driver. As a result, the authorities quickly figured out who the Drag King was and contacted him. With his face clearly shown on the video, he didn't have much to say."

As for the future, based on past success, ATCi is now installing a surveillance system at the parking structure at the Miami Beach Convention Center and looks forward to working with the Parking Department for many more years.

What's the secret to their success with the Parking Department? "As with any project, the reliability of the equipment is critical," Vento replies. "If a camera goes out, there are no images. If the DVR goes out, there is no record. It's really that simple."

Infinova

By helping channel partners provide their customers with complete, affordable, best-in-class, large and small video surveillance solutions, Infinova helps integrators generate more business more profitably. Leveraging a manufacturing process certified to ISO 9001:2000 standards and over 250 engineers with a list of video industry firsts, Infinova channel partners provide their end-users with industry-acknowledged product reliability and technical leadership.

So that Infinova channel partners can create complete solutions, Infinova provides IP surveillance cameras and components, CCTV analog cameras, DVRs and components, camera accessories, monitors, power supplies and fiber optics communications devices. Infinova also has the technical ability and manufacturing flexibility to let integrators propose customized solutions. In addition, Infinova will partner with other manufacturers making other surveillance equipment and software to help its channel partners create turnkey solutions. Contrary to most other companies, Infinova will back-up their partners' products as well as its own to assure both the integrator and its customers that one call – to Infinova only – takes care of everything.

Infinova works diligently to assure its channel partners can provide cost-conscious solutions. With Infinova's hybrid systems, channel partners can propose systems that protect a customer's investment in its already-installed analog surveillance system but that also put them on a dynamic migration pathway to IP systems.

Infinova is lauded for its exceptional maintenance programs. A major highlight is the company's 24-hour advanced replacement policy in which a substitute product is shipped immediately upon notice of a problem.

With such customer focus, Infinova is often referred to as "the integrators' manufacturer."

Global Contact Information

Infinova
The Integrator's Manufacturer

United States
Infinova
51 Stouts Lane
Monmouth Junction, NJ, 08852
United States
Phone: +1 732-355-9100
         +1 888-685-2002 (toll-free)
Fax: +1 732-355-9101
Email: Sales@infinova.com

Latin America
Miami: +1-954-990-0787
Mexico: +52-55-5392-1735
Venezuela: +58-212-336-0661
Brazil: +55-11-7479-5640
Email: Sales-LAR@infinova.com

Europe
Phone: +40 2 6841 5582
Email: Sales-EUR@infinova.com

Middle East
Phone: +965 247 5678
Email: Sales-ME@infinova.com

India
Sales: +0091 9980728579
        (South and East India)
Email: Sales-IND@infinova.com

Hong Kong
Phone: +852 2795 6540
Email: Sales-HK@infinova.com