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Making the Connection Between Video and Deterrence



When video presented itself as an option, Flowing Wells High School jumped at the chance. Comprehensive video coverage of the parking lot, commonly the site of vandalism and theft, has demonstrated the power of surveillance as a deterrent. Since implementation, there have been no incidences of theft or vandalism in the parking lots. The system has been so effective that the school is looking to increase the number of cameras to prevent problems and better protect students.

Flowing Wells High School in Tucson, Arizona is completely new to video. While an investment in video has been on the discussion table for the last six years, each year budget priorities and lack of funds prevented them from investing in a surveillance system.

Video was not considered critical because Flowing Wells is fortunate to have few serious security problems. Incidences include the ever-common student fights, vandalism, and petty theft. While certainly not welcome problems, in today's day and age these inci-

dences are nothing short of expected in high schools. However, tired of dealing with several incidences of vandalism and theft each year, the administration at Flowing Wells hired security guards to patrol the school on foot at night.

"We hired security officers to patrol the campus each night and on weekends. It was the most practical, cost-effective solution we could think of. We hoped that having someone on site during prime crime-time would deter unlawful activities at our school," said

Dr. Nicholas Clement, Superintendent of Flowing Wells Unified School District.

So when video presented itself as a viable alternative, Flowing Wells jumped at the chance. Wren, a Jefferson City, Missouri-based provider of video surveillance solutions for more than 25 years, approached Flowing Wells about piloting some IP cameras and Wren Video Management System (VMS) Software.

“Wren opened the door for us to be able to experiment with video and determine its place in our school. They had some great technology and really understood our security challenges as well as our budget and resource limitations,” noted Dr. Clement.

Strategic Decisions

Understanding where the majority of problems take place, Flowing Wells decided to focus initially on coverage of the parking lot. This is the site of many incidents, including vandalism of cars and thefts. It was also a strategic entry point, because anyone travelling to the school in a vehicle must pass through the main gate and into the parking lot. Covering this area would hopefully deter vandalism and theft in the parking lot, as well as serve as a “watchtower” to identify suspicious intruders or visitors to the campus during off hours.

The administration at Flowing Wells had other strategic benefits in mind as well. Never having used video cameras before, they feared push-back from parents and students. “While people recognize that cameras are intended to protect students and staff, there are still privacy concerns that present themselves any time you start monitoring common areas. By starting with the parking lot, we knew video was a win-win for everyone,” recalled Dr. Clement.

The Implementation

The school installed Wren Environmental Globes with integrated IP cameras to cover the entire length of the parking lot in good detail; where one camera leaves off, the next picks up, ensuring comprehensive coverage.

True day/night cameras also provide clear images both day and night for 24 hour surveillance.

As far as implementing video on the network, the IT team at Flowing Wells found it to be a very manageable process. “The truth is, the process was much simpler than I had anticipated. We established a VLAN and maintain the video on a secure server in the administrative domain. Only certain individuals—principals, the

superintendent and security officers are able to access the video. We have really made an effort to protect the video itself as well as students’ and staff’s privacy,” said Flowing Wells’ Director of IT, John Vallejos.

Wren VMS Software has proven extremely easy to use. For example, one feature allows users to flag video that shows activity during the night, when the campus is supposedly deserted. This makes it easy for users to pull up video of any activity that took place over night without having to scan through extensive video.

Making the Connection

While the video has been used to resolve issues or investigate

incidences, even more powerful has been the system’s apparent ability to deter. While Dr. Clement notes that it’s too early to draw a conclusion, he admits that in the three months since the system was installed, there has not been one incident of vandalism during the day and no theft at night.

In fact, the system has been so effective that Flowing Wells is considering replacing on-site security guards with cameras. “IP technology enables us to view video remotely, so when an incident does occur, we can immediately assess the situation from home or wherever we may be. So far, it’s shown itself a very powerful tool,” said Dr. Clement. The superintendent and principals have access to cameras on the weekends, making it easy to investigate the scene in case a situation does arise. The plan is to strategically implement cameras across the district where they can prevent other problems and better protect students.

