

ESS-Security and SmartDisc help catch thieves in the act



The team in ESS-Security's monitoring centre in Leeds takes part in dramas as they unfold every day. They are the first to know when an alarm is triggered at a client's premises and then decide what action to take. Often, this means calling the police and these calls are much appreciated, finds ESS-Security Ltd Managing Director Bill Gray – they help catch criminals.

Vista SmartDisc is one of the keys to ESS's prompt action. SmartDisc is a transmission system with integrated digital recorder. The units are installed on clients' premises and start transmitting CCTV images to ESS whenever a motion alarm is triggered. The system's flexibility has led ESS to make extensive use of SmartDisc units in monitoring a wide range of premises.

"We get results almost every day," says Bill Gray. Police operators have commented that they know the call will relate to a real incident when they take a call from ESS, he says. The scale of the response is sometimes extraordinary – "it seems like we've got the whole of the police force there," he says.

"It is a very proactive system, which is what we like about it," says Bill Gray. SmartDisc is recording continuously but only starts sending the images to ESS's control room when an alarm is activated. "Operators can instantly rewind time and see what happened a few minutes before the alarm went off. We haven't found another product that is as flexible and user-friendly from an operators' point of view."

ESS is has been a major user of the Vista SmartDisc system for some time and was one of the first to adopt the latest model in the range. The VLS-10DR 10-way high quality digital recorder includes features that are new to the SmartDisc range, including Triplex™ operation (which enables simultaneous access by multiple remote users to live or recorded video without halting the recording) and Multi-Unicast functionality (that allows both IP and dial-up connections).

A built-in LAN means that SmartDisc can also be used for local review and control. Other features include a removable 320Gb hard drive, camera control, bi-directional audio transmission, integral video motion detection and multiple alarm inputs.

Once the alarm is raised, the client's system automatically connects with the receiver PCs in the monitoring station. It begins by transmitting the image taken at the moment of the alarm, followed by live video of the incident as it progresses. ESS uses the SmartControl Pro software to monitor the SmartDisc units. "We have used

other systems in the past, but when we looked at SmartDisc we realised immediately how easy it was to use, the quality of the images and the realistic price,” says Bill Gray.

Tailored approach

The company’s customers are diverse. The Leeds-based monitoring centre keeps tabs on everything from a holiday villa in Cyprus to major office and retail concerns. “Every system is tailored to the client’s needs – and their budget of course,” says Bill Gray.

Of particular use to ESS is SmartDisc’s flexibility in handling different means of communication. With both private and commercial customers, ESS needs to be able to communicate via a range of connections. “We have clients on ISDN and on broadband and we are now looking at using the wide area network of a large commercial client,” says Bill Gray.

Distance is no barrier to success in catching criminals – though police in places such as Glasgow are often initially bemused to receive a call from Yorkshire describing a robbery in progress on their patch.

Close to home

Not all customers are far afield. One of the local customers is camping and outdoor chain Barretts of Feckenham – one of its four branches is close to ESS-Security’s head office.

Shortly after the camera installation, the cameras picked up a gang while it was rolling up the display tents and taking them away. “They thought they were safe – it was pitch black,” says Bill Gray. Unbeknown to the thieves, the cameras have image intensifiers and the ESS team was watching their every move. The police were notified of a crime in progress and responded in force, including sending a helicopter. “Six of them were arrested,” recalls Bill Gray.



ESS-Security had also notified the store’s manager. “I could have arrived before the police as I was nearby. But ESS told me not to rush – they didn’t want me to arrive on my own. The service is fantastic - very professional, but very personal as well,” he says.

Extra pairs of eyes

“Our operators’ brief is two-fold - to get the culprits arrested and more importantly to prevent loss or damage to the client’s premises,” says Bill Gray. “If they see

someone, their first reaction is to phone the police. If there is a risk of damage, the operator can then talk to the intruder or turn on lights, sirens and warnings.”

With the advantage given by the cameras, ESS’s controllers also often advise the police on how best to approach a situation, for example telling them which entrance to use. “In some situations, if you don’t warn them they will put on blues and twos and will frighten the suspects off before they can get to them,” says operator Brian. “When they listen to us they get arrests – it’s as simple as that.”

Facing the evidence

The CCTV recordings can also help after the event. One person caught on Barretts’ premises proffered an elaborate story about how his friends had thrown his keys over the fence for a joke. He might even have got away with the excuse if the camera recordings had not made clear that this was a lie.

The cameras also provide invaluable evidence in other types of crime that have not triggered an alarm, such as those taking place while the premises are in use. “Clients will often come back to us, tell us what happened and ask what we can find,” says Bill Gray. “The quality of the images is so good that we can often help.” Stolen cheques and masked robberies in shops are among the recent incidents where the cameras have helped provide continuity of evidence or a glimpse of a face or vehicle. Another example in the company’s archive of recent incidents shows a newly jump-started car being stolen from a car dealer’s forecourt by what appeared to be an opportunist thief. But the cameras proved that he was part of a gang that had been lurking round the site for a while, looking for something to take.

Caught in the act

Thieves, ram raiders, drug users and even people using car parks as a racetrack are spotted and caught in the act. They only realise that they have been seen when the police arrive.

“Most people think that cameras are only linked to video recorders and so they feel safe, but all of ours are monitored,” says Bill Gray. They tend to be completely unaware that the image quality is so good. He buys his cameras from Norbain. “The quality of service is second to none. It’s not often we need advice but when we do, the advice is exceptionally good. I can’t fault them,” he says.