

The Convenience of CCTV at Budgens Local

Budgens Local - Budgens' franchise neighbourhood store brand - suffered from unacceptably high losses due to theft, despite having CCTV installed in every store. A store-by-store refurbishment programme is gradually replacing each outdated system with some of the latest equipment available on the market. The results are remarkable, and prove that the quality of product, design and installation is central to achieving high quality results.

Convenience shopping

Anglia Convenience Stores, trading as Budgens Local, owns 27 stores throughout Norfolk, each with an average of 2,000 square feet of retail space. The company, which traded under the Alldays brand until eighteen months ago, has seen its turnover rocket in recent months and is anticipated to reach £24m this financial year.



With over six hundred employees, Budgens Local is an important part of the local economy. It also represents a landmark in neighbourhood retailing, for Budgens is the first example of a national chain using independent traders to front their local convenience brand. Anglia Convenience Stores is the forerunner, with 27 of the existing 35 Budgens Local stores throughout Britain. Although Budgens is sole

supplier to Budgens Local, Anglia Convenience Stores retain control over pricing and the product mix in each store. This is crucial in a social economy as mixed as Norfolk's.

Every store needs a CCTV system to provide a deterrent and, if that fails, the evidence to ensure a successful prosecution.

It may appear as the quietest county in England (after all, it still doesn't have a motorway), but Norfolk is far from crime free. The county faces very similar social challenges to every other part of the country with fast growing crime often related to drug and alcohol abuse. As a result, every store needs a CCTV system to provide a deterrent and, if that fails, the evidence to ensure a successful prosecution.

Investment not overhead

As part of a rolling programme of store refurbishment, each Budgens Local owned by Anglia Convenience Stores, is receiving a very extensive re-fit. Part of this now automatically involves the installation of a new CCTV system by specialist installers, Initial Surveillance, and supplied by Norbain SD, Europe's leading CCTV distributor.

Peter Head, Operations Director of Anglia Convenience Stores, explains that CCTV, at an average cost of £8,000 per store, was originally perceived as a necessary overhead, not as an investment in the company's profitability:

"Until I realised the dramatic improvement that a new, modern, advanced CCTV system could deliver, I viewed CCTV as just another overhead. I now appreciate that it is more of an investment than a cost. We have plenty of solid evidence – including our financials – that show that CCTV is paying dividends in reducing shrinkage to levels that other retailers can only dream about."

System overview

As the refurbishment programme has continued, the precise mix of equipment installed in each store has changed, reflecting the vibrancy of an industry that produces new CCTV products at a remarkable rate.

Vista is the primary brand of camera and monitor within each store.

Essentially each store features a highly visible, high performance Vista

monitor (such as a Vista PVD1400D high performance 14" colour monitor) positioned within the shop to make it very clear to all shoppers that a CCTV system is in operation.



Carefully positioned around the store, covering key aisles, counters, entrances and exits, are between 10-14 colour Vista Dome cameras with smoke coloured covers (usually the Vista VFD4V9C colour dome camera). These are often recess mounted in the ceiling.

In each store, the primary monitoring point is in a back room where another Vista monitor is to be found (for example, the Vista TV14 14" plastic case colour monitor) alongside a Digital Sprite 2 digital video recorder and keyboard from Dedicated Micros. Each digital recorder is linked to a CD writer so that images can be downloaded onto CD for police use. The whole system is then networked to the central offices of Anglia Convenience Stores, from where remote monitoring of every shop can be undertaken over an ordinary ISDN telephone line using Digital Sprite network software.

"The precise configuration in each store varies slightly with some using covert cameras and others with slightly older kit," explains Peter Head. "However this is the general model we're working to and it's paying dividends very quickly."

A good example is the store within Norwich railway station. This new store was fitted with a high specification CCTV system incorporating covert cameras. From day one, it



has regularly suffered from thefts and between ten and twenty thieves are caught on camera each week. "Within its first week of trading, the shop fell victim to a robbery," tells Peter Head, "but, thanks to the excellence of the CCTV system, a successful prosecution resulted." As this story is recalled, the shop assistant

replays images from just two days earlier showing a different crime in which a woman is spotted stealing a bottle of wine from the store. This also led directly to an arrest and an immediate 24hr term of imprisonment.

Evidential quality

"CCTV does have a deterrent effect on some criminals, but others don't recognise a dome camera in the ceiling and think they're in the clear or are simply too desperate. This means that the evidential quality of digital recording – which is excellent – is important in securing a prosecution. This is where we have found the investment particularly worthwhile. We've never had so many criminals caught followed by so many successful prosecutions. Often these are people wanted in other counties for similar crimes! This is good for business because Budgens Local is developing a reputation for being a difficult steal and this is cutting our losses very significantly. The vast majority of thieving in the railway station store is now limited to criminals walking straight in off the train. Local thieves have largely been deterred."

The local police force is reportedly delighted with the success of the installations in Budgens Local stores, in particular by the quality of the recordings. However, one issue does hamper the Police. Unable to handle CDs locally, these have to be sent to London for processing.

Another anecdote comes from the Haleston store where a knife robbery resulted in an arrest within two hours thanks to the clarity of the digital recording. Moreover, in Blundell, an elderly Gentleman was caught routinely stealing his daily newspaper. CCTV is, of course, primarily there to protect staff and property. But sadly, crime is not always limited to outside criminals. Thefts by staff have been a problem in the past too. For instance, in one absurd incident staff were filmed drinking in the store after hours.

Peter Head is forthright about the ability of CCTV to pay for itself through reduced losses:

“I can confidently say that many of our stores recoup their investment within twelve months. Assuming a five year life for the system, that’s four years of improvements to our shrinkage figures straight onto the bottom line of each store.”

Remote monitoring

Back in the central offices of Anglia Convenience Stores, the controller, Neil Moore sits at an ordinary PC watching the comings and goings in the company’s stores across the county. Utilising the system’s Network Viewer software, each shop – using its unique IP address - can be dialled-into remotely over an ISDN line. Up to sixteen cameras per location can be monitored in this way although only one shop can be ‘visited’ at each time. Images from a single shop can be viewed in full or quad mode and the hard disc of each store can be searched by time and date without interrupting recording. Zoom and pan control of individual cameras is only undertaken in-store.

Neil Moore explains that a considerable amount of monitoring is undertaken remotely, including from individuals’ homes using a laptop running the remote viewing software. “Often we will identify an incident in progress remotely, and can advise the store accordingly to follow things at closer range. Inevitably, staff are busy in-store and crimes can be committed right under the noses of staff without them being aware. That’s no discredit to the staff concerned; after all, they’re not security guards and they have a lot of work to do around the store.”

“Technology may remain one step ahead of the police,” comments Peter Head, “but with this system, we remain one step ahead of the petty thieves. That’s good for our staff, our customers and our business. Our system proves that CCTV is a good investment, deters crime and catches criminals.”