

## Virgin Active puts safety first in security



*The Virgin Active health and fitness chain is big business, with close to 100 clubs in the UK, South Africa and Italy. All the clubs boast state-of-the-art fitness equipment and facilities, and there is no better example of these qualities than the Sheffield Life Centre – purpose built, and the biggest and most recent of their clubs.*

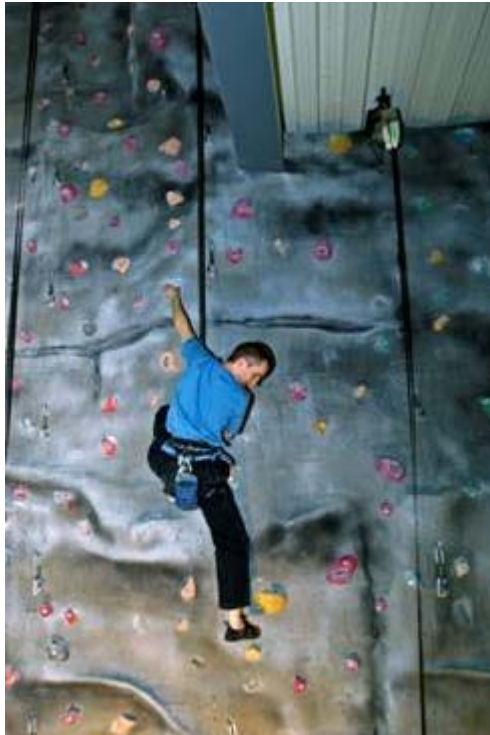
*Virgin Active Life Centres are described as ‘total clubs’, offering a huge range of activities. This breadth of activities, facilities and equipment at the clubs adds up to two key security requirements – the need to ensure the security of a range of expensive equipment and, even more important, safety. Leisure clubs have areas where monitoring safety is more vital than in most public areas because of the heightened risks – for example the children’s pool and the other pools, the climbing wall, and all the exercise machine areas. The exercise and dance studios, Life Library, café and bar are also monitored. Supporting the safety of all customers and staff at all times in all locations is central to the security systems.*



### Safety is the key

The internal system covers all the public and staff areas within the building. The formal requirement was drawn up by Virgin Active and then refined by installer Mercury Fire and Security. Ashley Foster, Director of Mercury Fire and Security, explained the

approach and the choice of equipment: “The requirement stated that fixed cameras were to be used, rather than using dome cameras. The fixed option needs a few more cameras, but when complete and continuous coverage is required for safety reasons by an unmanned system, fixed views have the edge. Cameras on tours may miss a vital event. With the spec for fixed cameras agreed, we chose Vista cameras, because they perform well and look good. Our policy is to specialise in selected high quality products with which we can gain real expertise.”



The 16 internal cameras are of two types - 10 Vista VC212 1/3" high resolution colour cameras providing a resolution of 470 TV lines and 6 Vista VWRD4V8C vandal resistant colour domes with built-in varifocal lenses giving a flexible field of view and protection from tampering. The cameras all link in to a central recording device, a VideoSwitch VDM16G160 16 Camera, 160GB digital video recorder.

Ashley Foster added:- "One of the factors in this contract is that we were installing as the building was being built. In some ways that is good – all the equipment and wiring can be installed as part of the building rather than an add-on. However, working as a CCTV installer on a construction site requires special training and special certification. Our company is registered with the CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme),

and conducted a risk assessment of working here during building construction.

### **A novel approach to perimeter protection**

The external requirement was twofold – safety plus perimeter protection.

The concept of the perimeter protection system was based on the long experience that both client and installer bring to this area. The main objective of perimeter security is to prevent any unauthorised entry. CCTV systems that simply record events for later viewing are sometimes useful for detection and prosecution, but they do little to prevent it happening except by their general deterrent qualities. Furthermore, if people come intent on breaking into a building where there is overt CCTV surveillance, they often cover their faces to prevent identification.

**safety  
plus  
perimeter  
protection**

Taking this as their start point, Mercury Security saw the potential of using an off-site 24-hour control centre to provide instant reaction to alarms. A control centre can transmit voice output to a site, warning any intruders that they can be seen, along with key information that is clearly specific to the incident rather than pre-recorded, and this is usually effective in deterring the intruder.

The system was built around an ADPRO Fast Trace Remote Access Digital Video Recorder. The external perimeter protection is based on Optex LRP 4010S Redwall devices, and the CCTV surveillance is provided by 6 Samsung SDN-520 colour/monochrome 1/3" fixed cameras, giving quality performance under all light conditions, automatically switching between colour and monochrome according to the light conditions.

When the Redwall perimeter protection detects a problem, it automatically sets up a connection between the ADPRO Fast Trace and the cameras at the Sheffield site, and the Nottingham-based 24-hour control centre managed by Mercury Fire and Security. The communications link uses ISDN, a dial-up digital communications connection that has enough bandwidth to carry an image stream as well as voice.

When the connection is made, the control centre staff receive the video streams from the external cameras at the Virgin Active site, selecting the cameras they need to use through the ADPRO software on their local computer. They can also transmit voice to the site, speaking through the external loudspeakers to warn off intruders. In addition to the automatic connection that is initiated from the site in the event of an alarm, the control centre staff can themselves set up a connection at any time they choose.



### **A very successful implementation**

Terry Knight is the Director of Safety and Engineering for all the Virgin Active operations around the world and has many years of experience of leisure club security. He is very pleased with the way the system has worked out. "All the security equipment here works very well, but I am particularly pleased with the off-site control room. It is a very effective part of our total approach to security. In fact we had an incident of a possible intruder at 3am recently, and he took off very quickly when challenged. It's good that such people and their friends know we have tight security.

"My job includes the constant review of security improvements at all our clubs, and implementing good ideas across the rest of the group as they apply. There is no doubt that the off-site control centre, operated by an installer, is a model that will be considered for our other sites. It is very effective, and saves money when compared to manned guarding. The system is a credit to all parties involved, including Mercury Fire and Security and their suppliers Norbain".