



October 2015
Case study - Integrated Security Monitoring

Bold Gemini and Integrated Visual Protection

The monitoring sector is no stranger to technical innovation with new security solutions continuously appearing on the scene. The challenge, not just for alarm receiving centres, but for all control rooms, is how to provide users with a reliable and efficient monitoring service in the context of a constantly evolving security product sector.

For example, the very latest DVR may be evaluated by a user on the basis of its image quality and onsite recording capabilities. However, different measures need to be applied if the product is to be used for remote alarm monitoring. For remote monitoring, image quality is less important than ensuring incidents are reliably and accurately communicated to the receiving centre, particularly as there are no generally adopted standards for CCTV alarm signalling.

There is a fine balance to be sought between usability, innovation and price. Quality of the images from a remotely monitored system should be sufficient to validate the cause of an alarm and to help determine the level of response, but need not be so prodigious as to slow the whole process down.

THE OPTIONS

Broadly, there are two alternatives for how to monitor a remote site. One is to use the control software provided by the product manufacturer – with the advantage that it will probably be low cost or even free and should almost certainly work reliably with the product supplied. It will be limited to working only with that products, so of little use for an integrated solution. However, if integration is not a requirement, this is a low cost option.

The other choice, which can handle a range of different products and integrate them in a way that is efficient, automated and generates better quality information, is a platform solution. These are the systems generally found in monitoring control rooms and the supplier of such software is usually manufacturer independent.

THE PLATFORM SOLUTION APPROACH

The platform software developer works in partnership with a many manufacturers, enabling the control room to need only one software solution for all their systems. These could include fire, intruder and panic alarms, as well as CCTV, audio, lone worker and access control. To accommodate the ever-changing product environment, new integration modules are constantly added, usually in response to user demand.

Further advantages offered by the platform approach is that only one database is needed in addition to only one common user interface, one set of servers (minimising energy and space requirements), a single report generator, one training program and only one contact number to remember for technical support.

INTEGRATED VISUAL PROTECTION, LONDON

This is the type of monitoring solution used in the accredited alarm receiving centre, Integrated Visual Protection. From their National Security Inspectorate (NSI) GOLD accredited BS5979 Cat II Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) in South East London, Integrated Visual Protection (IVP) provides Closed Circuit Television Monitoring, and Alarm and Fire Monitoring.

Other services include vehicle tracking, mobile patrol, alarm response, static guarding and the design, installation, commissioning and maintenance of electronic security systems such as intruder and hold up alarms, closed circuit television systems and access control systems.

Operations Director, Piers Brown, commented, “Providing a range of integrated security and safety monitoring solutions/services is a complex undertaking requiring careful planning and implementation. At IVP, we have a very exacting requirement: To deliver a level of service expected of a ‘Premier League’ security contractor, without all the additional and nonsensical costs usual attributed thereto. This requirement includes installing products that are specifically tailored to each specification, are dependable, resource efficient and will exceed the ‘standard’ expectation. The issue that usually arises from providing such bespoke services is that each solution needs its own management software/hardware, which is seldom cost effective. This also raises other concerns including accommodating, different equipment, power, user training, support, audit and reporting.”

THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

Piers continued, “It was important to us that not only did the platform support those products we use, but that the quality of the integration met our requirements. This, especially so, given the absence of industry protocols in some of these areas, for example, there is no standard for CCTV alarm signalling. This means that the quality and functionality of interfaces varies significantly from one supplier causing problems for some ARCs and their monitored customers. Manufacturers are naturally more concerned with how their products perform rather than how well they work with platform management software.”

BOLD GEMINI INTEGRATED MONITORING SOFTWARE

Gemini software, developed by Bold for the UK integrated security monitoring market over the last 8 years, is now used in over 170 control rooms. Gemini’s success owes it to ‘customer led’ design combined with leading development technologies. As one of a very few monitoring solutions providing full integration across all alarm types with IP CCTV, lone worker protection and audio monitoring, the focus is on providing a close fit with an ARC’s needs and avoiding the ‘one size fits all’ approach commonly adopted by software providers in this sector. To identify the right solution for their requirements, IVP conducted a detailed assessment of all aspects of the Gemini software against their specific requirements.

Using the Gemini platform enables the user to rationalise hardware, dispensing with the need for a server for each application. This reduces the need for technical support for each machine, and the time and cost of maintaining multiple operating systems. Multiple points of failure and power consumption are minimised, therefore reducing the company’s carbon footprint, in addition to the amount of space needed in the equipment room. All this adding up to operational efficiency and provides significant cost savings.

Key amongst the considerations was the design and layout of the user interface. IVP was keen to avoid the clunky and dated interfaces which have been a feature of ARC software for so many years. The Gemini interface is immediately familiar to users of the current Microsoft Office suite, with functionality accessed by tabs and the .NET ribbon, rather than the icons and drop down menus of the 1990s. This makes it intuitive and easy to learn, accessible to all levels of control room operator.

A comprehensive range of stable and well-designed receiver interfaces is also an essential feature of any monitoring platform. Off the shelf, Bold supports all industry standard alarm formats and signalling methods, together with those CCTV systems commonly used in Remote Video Receiving Centres (RVRCs), along with audio monitoring, lone worker and telecare systems. The Gemini feature range is constantly being enhanced with new interfaces and modules designed around users' requirements.

Bold Gemini processes data, video, audio and event signalling from non-security applications, for instance, SMS and emails, as well as alarms, CCTV, access control and tracking applications. This diverse data is pulled together for total situational awareness to create a complete overview and response.

CONCLUSION

Having now had the opportunity to use the Gemini monitoring solution for some time, IVP are more than satisfied with the product's performance as well as the excellent 24/7 support. Piers comments, "We feel that our original decision to choose Bold Gemini has been more than justified and are confident that it will remain the vanguard in this sector".

Remote monitoring spans a wide range of security and safety applications not to mention high volume contacts and processes. The job of the platform supplier and operator is to work together to leverage all these aspects to maximise the quality and performance of the service provided. This requires a sound operational strategy and effective organisational approach managed by a software platform that has been carefully thought through, meticulously designed and comprehensively supported.

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