

Everything Works With Everything

Mid-West Food Retailer's Video Surveillance System Evolves Over Decade-Long Relationship with March Networks

Coborn's Inc., a grocery retailer based in St. Cloud, Minnesota, recently celebrated a video surveillance milestone – having just replaced the last of the March Networks video recorders it purchased a decade ago with a March Networks 8000 Series Hybrid NVR.

The mid-West grocery retailer has consistently upgraded and expanded its systems during that 10-year span and now has more than two hundred March Networks® hybrid recorders, including new 8000 Series units and a growing Command Enterprise server-based deployment in North Dakota.

Interoperability and centralized management of different recorder models and cameras maximizes Coborn's investment in video surveillance infrastructure.

"That's one of the things I like about being a March Networks customer," said Scott Mineart, Coborn's loss control project manager. "I don't have to forklift out everything I have in order to introduce new technology. Everything works with everything. That compatibility weighs heavily in our decision-making process."



Coborn's has been able to take advantage of advances in technology at its own pace without having to incur the expense of prematurely replacing equipment.

The company operates 48 full-serve grocery stores under the Coborn's, Cash-Wise and Save-a-Lot banners. It also operates 36 liquor stores and 34 convenience stores for a total of 118 locations in six states: Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois.

One of the most significant changes Mineart has seen over the years relates to use of the video surveillance system. Though originally acquired as a loss prevention tool, it's now widely used by Coborn's operations management to keep an eye on merchandising, store presentation, cleanliness and customer traffic.

"Loss prevention is a minority user now," said Mineart.

Always looking to the future, Coborn's is currently in the midst of a conversion to March Networks Command Enterprise video management software.

The original plan was to just deploy the browser-based solution at Coborn's locations in North Dakota's booming Bakken oil fields, said Mineart.

"We weren't going to deploy it enterprise-wide for a couple of years, but we had a lot of good feedback from corporate users on the interface, so we decided to jump ahead.

"One of the best things about Command is that I don't have to worry anymore about updates across hundreds and hundreds of clients," he noted.

Command Enterprise runs on commercial-off-the-shelf servers and supports both recorders and server-based systems in multiple-location deployments.

The video management system also allows users to access live or archived video from any location on an iPhone, iPad, Blackberry, Android or Windows Mobile device using March Networks Cloud.

Concurrent with the upgrade to Command, Coborn's is deploying a new chain-wide exception reporting system that is being integrated with the Command software, so investigators viewing exception reports with no-sales, refunds and voids will be able to click through to the corresponding video of a point-of-sale transaction.

The grocery retailer has relied on March Networks Certified Solution Provider Marco Inc. for its security needs since 2003 when it first transitioned to digital video surveillance.

"We installed two 4210 DVRs at one of their Cash-Wise stores and ran them side-by-side with their VCRs," recalled Marco sales consultant Jason Becker. "We had a cable coming back to the DVR and put a splitter on it so it recorded to VHS and to the DVR from the same camera. They showed their execs how much better the video was and that convinced them to go digital."

Cameras

The company still has a "huge" deployment of analog cameras, but has also been deploying an assortment of March Networks IP cameras, including MegaPX MicroDomes, MegaPX WDR MiniDomes, and the new MegaPX 360 Indoor Dome, which it has installed in cash counting rooms and on sales floors.

The 360 Indoor Dome captures 360-degree or 180-degree panoramic views in five megapixel resolution, eliminating blind spots and the need to

deploy multiple cameras to capture the same scene from every angle.

Camera counts are also increasing. A full-size Coborn's or Cash-Wise store can now have anywhere from 50 to 90 cameras.

"Initially, we had a two-to-one cash register to camera ratio," said Mineart. "Now, the standard is one-to-one. We've also been adding megapixel cameras to the parking lots, and sales floor, so all that has resulted in an increase in the number of cameras."

The alarm integration capability of the March Networks systems also comes in handy.

"Most of our full-service grocery stores are open 24 hours, so burglar alarms are not an issue, but we have a lot of local alarms," said Mineart.

At night, when customer traffic is down and staffing levels are reduced, alarms at the front entrance alert employees via the public address system that a customer has entered the store. Other alarms alert staff to customers at the service desk.

"We can check the alarm history at a glance and the video is right there," said Mineart.

Coborn's Inc.

Coborn's Inc. is a grocery retailer operating under the Coborn's, Cash-Wise and Save-a-Lot banners. Based in St. Cloud, Minnesota, 65 miles (105 kilometres) northwest of Minneapolis, the company operates 48 full-serve grocery stores, 36 liquor stores and 34 convenience stores, for a total of 118 locations in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois.
www.coborns.com



Coborn's isn't a typical customer, said Becker. "Scott is very hands on. He likes to talk to the March Networks engineers and pick their brains. He experiments with the system and finds all kinds of ways to get the most out of it. Just recently, he inquired about using a four-channel encoder to run a refrigeration alarm through the March Networks

system and email management when a unit is down. He comes up with these solutions and implements them. He's very forward thinking."

Coborn's loss prevention staff make a point of staying on top of the video surveillance market.

The company has inherited other video surveillance systems through acquisitions and does testing of competing products from other vendors, but has stuck with March Networks systems because of their high performance, backward compatibility and proven reliability.

"March Networks isn't the least expensive solution out there, but when I have a recorder that's been in service for a decade and I haven't had to forklift it out three times, that counts for a lot," said Mineart. ▼

MARCO, INC.

Marco Inc. is an IT, voice and video service provider based in St. Cloud, Minnesota. A March Networks Certified Solution Provider, Marco serves customers in the health care, education, retail and financial sectors from offices in Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota, North Dakota and Iowa.

www.marconet.com



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From Coborn's head office in St. Cloud, Minnesota, loss prevention staff are able to review video from 118 locations, including 48 full-service grocery stores.

