

Woolworths Opts for Bandwidth Friendly Solution

Largest Retailer in Australia Relies on 2,500 March Networks NVRs to Manage Risks



Australia's vast geography, sparse population and limited bandwidth posed a serious challenge for the country's largest retailer when it went shopping for a networked video surveillance system in 2006.

WITH 3,500 supermarkets, general merchandise, home improvement, consumer electronics and liquor stores, as well as petrol stations located across Australia and New Zealand, Woolworths required a video surveillance system capable of operating over bandwidth links of 64 kilobits per second or less.

"When we went to public tender five years ago, we received more than 300 responses," recalled Darin Crofts, Woolworths' Loss Prevention Manager responsible for special projects. "We evaluated 12 respondents and got that down to a shortlist of two over a period of six weeks. One of them was Sydney-based Asset Security Concepts, a March Networks Certified Solution Provider.

"We put both units into our IT labs, evaluated them for three or four weeks and came together as a group to make a decision," said Crofts. "We had representation

from several divisions of the company, including IT, Loss Prevention and Health and Safety. When all was said and done, the March Networks® product scored highest."

The ability to operate in a bandwidth-challenged environment was of paramount importance. At the time, Woolworths had to make do with a 64 kb/s link to many of its rural locations. The bandwidth also had to accommodate the retailer's back office data, "so, in reality, we wanted the video surveillance system to operate at a data transfer rate of 32 kb/s," said Crofts.

The 4000 C Series hybrid recorders deployed by Woolworths feature March Networks' industry-leading MPEG-4 video compression engine, which eliminates redundant spatial and temporal information from stored video. Also contributing to efficient use of available bandwidth is March Networks' Adaptive Compression Technology, which eliminates extraneous data caused by electrical noise. The resulting video is displayed in the highest quality, while saving significantly on bandwidth and disk space.

To make sure that the transmission of vital back office data isn't affected, the March Networks Visual Intelligence Software allows users to cap bandwidth used for video transmission.



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“Dragging archived video across the network is painful because of our bandwidth issues, but if it takes two hours to download 10 minutes of video from a remote location, it’s still better than the eight to 12 hours it would take to get to that particular site,” said Crofts.

Reliability and ease of use were also high on Woolworths’ list of requirements.

“The DVR we started out with years ago performed well at first, but over a period of approximately 18 months, the reliability of the product and the service from the company supplying it began to deteriorate,” he said. “It got to the point where it was no longer viable. That’s when we decided to go to tender again, so reliability was a big issue for us. We have approximately 2,500 March Networks NVRs deployed across the country and only one or two of them have failed in the last couple of years.”

Woolworths’ loss prevention staff at the company’s support office in Bella Vista, a suburb of Sydney, use a data mining tool to identify

suspicious transactions, and access archived video from the store in question for validation purposes. Thumbnails served up by March Networks’ Visual Intelligence Software help loss prevention officers zero in on a video clip, limiting the amount of video streamed across the network.

The system is also used by the retailer’s safety, health and environment group to investigate slip, trip and fall claims.

“It’s a lot easier to justify the cost of a video surveillance system if we get buy-in from across the business,” said Crofts. “Loss prevention is seen as a cost center because we don’t generate any revenue, so it’s important for us to show a benefit in terms of reduced shrinkage or fewer liability claims. We have to make a case for every dollar we spend on video surveillance equipment and, to be honest, if it’s not going to give us a benefit, there’s not much point in it.”

Ease of use is important to Woolworths because thousands of store managers across the country have to know how to search for video and



share evidence with local law enforcement agencies in the event of an incident.

“We have two types of users,” said Crofts. “We have the loss prevention professional who does investigations and is probably a little more savvy, and we have the store managers who are primarily concerned with sales and store operations. CCTV is a tool they use when they need to use it, so the simpler it is to operate, the better.”

Australia’s infrastructure is improving, but many Woolworths locations in rural areas still have to contend with data transmission speeds of 128 kb/s or less, limiting the widespread adoption of higher resolution IP cameras, but the company is trialing March Networks’ MegaPX 720p HD cameras and video analytics such as queue length monitoring to assess their potential benefits and stay current with the evolution of the video surveillance market. ▼



Woolworths Limited, the largest retailer in Australia and New Zealand, operates approximately 3,500 stores, including supermarkets, petrol stations, general merchandise stores, home improvement outlets, consumer electronics stores and liquor stores under a variety of brand names. Woolworths Australia was founded in 1924 and employs 191,000 people.

www.woolworthslimited.com.au

Asset Security Concepts

Asset Security Concepts (www.ascpty.com.au), a March Networks Certified Solution Provider based in Sydney, Australia, sells and services a broad range of security solutions to companies and organizations in the retail, financial services, government and transportation sectors. To contact a sales representative, please call +61 2 9648 2100 or email sales@ascpty.com