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Creating memories and building partnerships with a comprehensive security solution

Avigilon Alta & Port Discovery Children's Museum case study

MOTOROLA SOLUTIONS

Nestled in downtown Baltimore, Port Discovery Children's Museum is a landmark and play center that provides unique opportunities and high-quality experiences that make play accessible, educational and fun for all. Spanning over 80,000 square feet and three floors, the museum showcases fascinating exhibits and programs designed to be interactive and educational.

Welcoming over 200,000 visitors annually and 78 employees working to create enjoyable, safe experiences, Port Discovery is a top destination for families and individuals. To remain a popular destination and provide engaging experiences, the organization's security operations must deliver quality safety and security measures. As a result, the organization identified key security challenges they wanted to overcome to improve safety.

Kelli Coffman, Senior Vice President of Museum Operations, conducted the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's (CISA) Security Assessment at First Entry (SAFE). The result was a list of recommendations the organization should address to continue to provide a safe and secure environment for its visitors and staff.

Customer profile

Port Discovery Children's Museum, Baltimore, MD

Industry

Non-profit

Solutions/Technology

- Avigilon Alta video management software
- Avigilon Ava 360 camera
- Avigilon Ava Dome camera
- Avigilon Ava Compact Dome camera
- Avigilon Ava Flex camera
- Avigilon Ava Quad camera
- Avigilon Alta Cloud Connector
- Avigilon Alta access control
- Avigilon Standard Smart Reader

Benefits

- With the introduction of Avigilon Alta access control and Standard Smart Readers, Port Discovery can better secure the museum from unwanted visitors and help protect children.
- Avigilon's cloud-connected cameras and Alta video management software have enabled the museum to quickly locate lost children using the Smart Search feature and support incident investigations.
- The AI-enabled Avigilon security cameras provide loitering detection around the facility so the security team can remove any potential threat and help safeguard visitors and employees.
- Law enforcement has praised Port Discovery's Avigilon security solution as they can now collect high-quality footage to support their investigations into incidents

Challenges

Safeguarding children in a busy environment

At Port Discovery, it's easy to get distracted by the exciting exhibits, play areas and noise, so it's no surprise that the organization faced a challenge to help keep children safe and secure. On numerous occasions, parents would approach staff for help looking for a child who had wandered off. In situations like these, it's essential that the child is located quickly, and one way to do that is with video security.

However, Port Discovery's previous video security and access control systems were outdated and inadequate. The video security system was not user-friendly and did not provide enough coverage to help the security team observe key areas in the facility. This made quickly locating missing children challenging, and the longer it took, the higher the likelihood that the situation could escalate.

Additionally, the organization's failing access control system created unnecessary challenges for the security team. Only one of the three doors had functioning access control measures, making it harder to maintain proper security. Securing critical areas, like the main atrium, became increasingly difficult as the system deteriorated.

During reconstruction at the museum, an intruder entered and stole employees' personal belongings due to the ineffective access control system. This incident highlighted the need for Port Discovery to improve security at key access points, ensuring that children remain safely inside and unauthorized individuals are kept out.

Keeping trouble away

While a busy downtown location offers benefits like increased foot traffic and convenient public transportation, it also comes with significant challenges. High crime rates, people experiencing homelessness, and the proximity to a bar district and transportation hub make it difficult to protect staff and vulnerable guests while preventing outside disturbances from affecting the museum.

Law enforcement has dealt with numerous instances of inappropriate behavior and crime near Port Discovery. During investigations of such incidents, they've contacted the museum for footage from their external security cameras. However, the security team has been unable to provide high-quality video or has found it cumbersome to export and share the evidence promptly.

The museum faces the additional challenge of managing public health and safety concerns related to substance use in the surrounding area. This issue increases the likelihood of visitors or museum employees finding themselves in a dangerous situation, such as empty parking lots or leaving the building at night. Additionally, people experiencing homelessness camping near the museum's location can cause issues related to trespassing and waste.

Therefore, Port Discovery's security team needs to have eyes on these areas to help detect and remove these individuals, observe the safety of visitors and staff and protect the museum from anti-social behavior. Unfortunately, their legacy video security system couldn't help the security team address these issues.

Solutions

Internally, Coffman, the security team and key stakeholders decided that a new security solution was needed. After discussions with their IT service provider and local law enforcement in 2022, Port Discovery was informed of a U.S. Federal Government grant they could apply for to offset future security expenditures. Upon securing this grant, the organization began upgrading its security setup.

Port Discovery selected Motorola Solutions' Avigilon as their provider of physical security technology to help them overcome their challenges. One major factor in this decision was that buying from a US-based company allowed the museum to qualify for a federal government grant.

The organization procured 39 cloud-connected security cameras from the Alta line, Avigilon's cloud-native security suite. This includes the Ava 360, Dome, Compact Dome, Flex and Quad cameras, supported by the open, scalable and easy-to-use Avigilon Alta video management software (VMS). As a cloud-based solution, authorized users can access live and recorded video from anywhere worldwide.

In addition to Avigilon's AI-powered security cameras, the museum procured the Alta Cloud Connector solution to integrate third-party security cameras and sensors into Alta VMS. Port Discovery also invested in Avigilon Alta cloud access control with 27 Standard Smart Readers for their entryways and key access points.

Port Discovery began preparing for installation in October 2023 and completed the project in February 2024.

> " We use Alta Video's Smart Search feature to comb through hours of video quickly. That is one of my favorite things in the world.
>
> — **Kelli Coffman, Senior Vice President of Museum Operations**
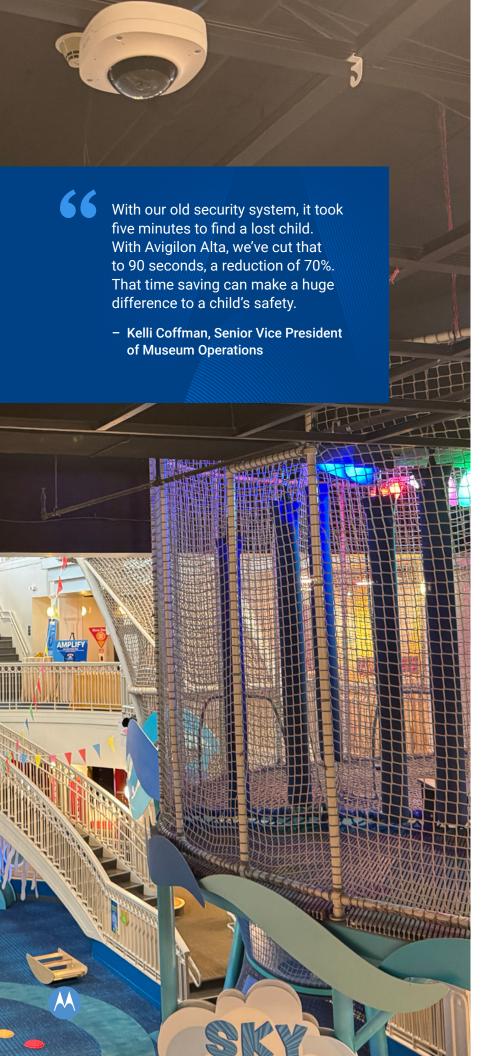
The benefits

A safer space for all

By implementing Avigilon Alta access control and Standard Smart Readers at key points throughout their facility, Port Discovery has enhanced the museum's security. The access control solution is set to delay egress, which means the doors won't open immediately unless there's an emergency. This helps prevent children from leaving the atrium unsupervised and provides an added safety measure for the museum.

Additionally, the cloud-based access control system from Avigilon Alta helps prevent unauthorized entry into the museum. Staff rooms and offices are now protected from unauthorized persons who can't bypass the Standard Smart Readers without the correct access credentials, helping keep employees safe and their belongings protected. Coffman and her security team can also manage access events from anywhere with the Alta Access mobile app, meaning they don't need to be physically present to perform actions such as granting access, providing guest passes and initiating lockdowns.

The Alta security cameras immediately proved their worth, too, thanks to their expansive coverage capabilities. Port Discovery had strategically installed these AI-enabled cameras in areas where staff and children may be alone to help protect their safety and investigate in case of a complaint. Soon after implementation, a complaint was made about a staff member lingering near restrooms and making children uncomfortable. Coffman's team took this complaint seriously and, with the Avigilon cameras observing activities near restrooms, were able to investigate the alleged incident and review footage promptly.

After a thorough investigation, including using Alta VMS' Smart Search feature to quickly locate footage of a staff member in a purple shirt near the restrooms, the team had its answer. The video evidence disproved the allegations, showing that no staff member was in the area at the time of the alleged incident. Ultimately, it was revealed that the complainant was a known scam artist.

The Alta cameras and the Smart Search feature have also been extremely helpful in locating lost children. By searching for the appearance of a child, such as the color of the clothes they're wearing, the museum's security team can quickly follow the child's movements and locate their live location so they can be reunited with their guardian.

> **"** With our old security system, it took five minutes to find a lost child. With Avigilon Alta, we've cut that to 90 seconds, a reduction of 70%. That time saving can make a huge difference to a child's safety.
>
> – Kelli Coffman, Senior Vice President of Museum Operations

Building a stronger partnership with law enforcement

To mitigate the risks of external threats, Port Discovery implemented Avigilon Alta's cloud-native video security solution across key positions around the museum's exterior. With the powerful cloud-native security cameras and the intelligent video analytics from Alta VMS, the security team has configured rules for after-hours detection and loitering.

As a result, if a group of individuals is detected loitering near the museum or a person experiencing homelessness decides to set up camp nearby, the video analytics will immediately detect this and automatically notify the security team. This efficient process enables Coffman's security team to respond quickly to remove the individuals and notify local law enforcement if needed.

The museum's partnership with law enforcement has strengthened since introducing Avigilon Alta's physical security technologies. Now, when police officers approach Port Discovery for video footage of events that have transpired near the museum, the security team can provide sharp evidentiary footage that supports and expedites law enforcement's investigations. This was evident in a domestic violence incident that occurred soon after the Avigilon cameras were installed, helping the local police department investigate what happened and providing support for the victim involved.

Law enforcement has been so impressed with Port Discovery's new Avigilon Alta solution that they've provided exceptional feedback to the organization and praised the sharp video footage obtained for recent police investigations. With multiple camera views, high-quality video and easy search capabilities, law enforcement can rely on the museum to support their drive to improve safety and security around the local area.

Conclusion

Port Discovery Children's Museum remains Baltimore's go-to place for fun educational activities. With a comprehensive security technology suite from Avigilon Alta that includes cloud-based video security and access control, the museum has improved onsite security and safety by restricting access to unauthorized individuals and capturing high-quality footage for investigatory purposes.

The enhanced security operations have been such a resounding success that, after meeting with local security leaders from Baltimore and sharing the positive experiences of using Avigilon technology, local officials are exploring the possibility of building a downtown security hub in Baltimore with Motorola Solutions' Avigilon at the center.

> " Overall, I'm extremely satisfied. Avigilon has exceeded all our expectations. The new solution is easy to use and comes in handy when I need to grant remote access to employees after hours. I simply bring up the Alta access control app on my phone and, within a few seconds, access is granted instantly.
>
> **– Kelli Coffman, Senior Vice President of Museum Operations**

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