

SECURITY FOR ALL

Detroit schools reduce theft, vandalism with proven security solution despite tight budget

BY KEITH JENTOFT

DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN CONTENDING WITH NEARLY INSURMOUNTABLE FINANCIAL ISSUES AND DECLINING ENROLLMENT THAT IS BELIEVED TO BE THE TRICKLE-DOWN EFFECT OF THE POOR ECONOMY. MICHIGAN GOV. JENNIFER GRANHOLM APPOINTED AN EMERGENCY FINANCIAL MANAGER TO FIX THE DISTRICT'S FINANCES, WHICH LED TO THE CLOSING OF 29 SCHOOLS AND THE MASSIVE OVERHAUL OF OTHERS.

Rampant theft and vandalism demanded an immediate solution to protect the vacant buildings and property under renovation. Budget realities meant traditional CCTV surveillance systems were simply too expensive. DPS wanted something different than watching video recordings of yesterday's crimes; they wanted to stop the losses, catch the criminals in the act and send a message to the community that things were improving.

Unprecedented Crime

Detroit Public Schools is one of the larger school systems in the country, with more than 190 schools and 90,000 students. Despite the fact that the district has its own police force, there simply are not enough officers to cover all the buildings.

Their vacant property and schools in the process of being renovated became magnets for crime. While vandalism has always been an issue, things escalated to an unprecedented scale. Thieves were targeting the utility room and would cut all power and communications lines. Groups of men systematically "mined" the closed school buildings for copper and anything of value, including plumbing fixtures and lighting.

Sledgehammers were used to break large holes in the walls to remove sections of copper pipe. Heating and plumbing fittings were cut away, and wiring was ripped from the walls.

Gaining Control

The crimes increased to the point that in certain buildings, DPS was forced to post its own officers to spend nights patrolling inside the buildings. DPS had used surveillance cameras and DVRs to secure some buildings, but these systems cost more than \$100,000 per school and did a poor job preventing vandalism.

In most instances, videos were reviewed after the damage had been done with few intruders identified—and even fewer arrested. With finances tight, school officials thought finding effective and affordable solutions and catching the perpetrators seemed unlikely.

Under pressure from mounting damage and potential liability, Mark K. Schrupp, the district's executive director of facilities management and auxiliary services, began researching various options and discovered a wireless video security system called Videofied that seemed promising. With this system, the goal was not only providing high-resolution video but arresting intruders. In addition, securing a building with the Videofied system was affordable.

Battery-powered MotionViewers are the key to the system. They are wireless devices equivalent to the size of a coffee cup that combine a passive infrared motion detector with a digital camera and illuminators for night vision. The cordless Videofied system functions for up to four years on a set of batteries in normal use. When a vandal trips the sensor, the MotionViewer sends a 10-second clip of the intrusion over the cell network to the central station for immediate review and dispatch. DPS liked the fact that the system could be installed anywhere, regardless of AC power or broadband access.

Another valued feature was the ability to move viewers as needs evolved in the district. DPS sought proposals from reputable integrators and chose D/A Central Inc. of



Oak Park, Mich., which is part of the PSA Security Network, a national organization of top security integrators.

As part of the contract, D/A Central conducted the site surveys, coordinated the installation and provided monitoring of the completed systems.

"We were concerned, however, that a single panel/hub would not provide sufficient radio range in these large school properties," said Dave Shelton, president of D/A Central. "Would we need multiple systems in each school?"

Sending a Message

Within two weeks of receiving the contract, the first systems went live.

"The performance of the Videofied wireless has been outstanding," said Jake Purcell, project manager for D/A Central. "Except for one property, we have been able to cover every school with a single wireless panel, using a battery-powered communicator with a cell modem."

Within three days of installation, the new system proved to be effective.

On a Wednesday night, six youths broke in a school carrying sledgehammers. The MotionViewer instantly sent a 10-second video clip of the intrusion to D/A Central's monitoring station; the operator saw the intruders and dispatched police, who arrested the teens.

Two more break-ins occurred the following week. Each time, the central station operator saw the intruders via the video clip and police were dispatched.

In the first four weeks, DPS made more than 45 arrests.

DPS has demonstrated that success is possible on a budget. They are expanding Videofied into other areas of the school system to address security concerns. Law enforcement strongly supports the solution, and they are publicizing the arrests to send a message to the surrounding community.

"Don't steal here, or we will catch you and prosecute to the fullest extent of the law." Shelton said. 📍

Keith Jentoft is the president of RSI Video Technologies.