

Synectics' Silver Control

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Andy Ford

Inspector for British Transport Police



British Transport Police's (BTP) 'Silver Control' is a fully equipped, wide-area CCTV enabled command and control center that is used to oversee major events and incidents in and around London. Its 'Silver' designation is a reference to its position in an overall command structure, of which Gold Command is responsible for formulating event strategies, whilst Silver command manage the deployment of resources to fulfill the strategic aims of Gold Command. At Bronze level, resources are directly controlled at the scene, such as individual officers and team leaders.

The Challenge

This command structure can not only be implemented at short notice, to deal with major security and public order incidents, but forms the major command

position for large-scale public events, such as the Concert for Diana at Wembley Stadium and the annual Notting Hill carnival.

Commissioned in August 2006, the state-of-the-art Silver Control command and control center was designed to provide a central nerve center from which the Silver Commander in charge could access a variety of visual information sources located across London and its surrounding areas. British Transport Police's Superintendent Ellie Bird, Silver Commander responsible for the capital's major events explains: "It is very important that I receive up to date and accurate information on the progression of events, not only regarding in and around an event's specific area but how for example, flows of people in one area can place pressure on a neighboring area.

The ability to effectively analyze crowd capacity at a venue and corresponding people movements across our transport system and beyond has become a vital aspect of effective policing in the capital."

To facilitate comprehensive event monitoring across the breadth of diverse areas, Silver Control gathers visual information from over 10,000 cameras drawn from all of London's boroughs, in addition to all underground and overground railway stations, the Docklands Light Railway, and even pictures from a police helicopter.

Controlling such a massive amount of diverse visual information from a variety of CCTV installations, containing many different manufacturers' equipment and protocols, is a tall order for any control system.

The Solution

Acknowledging the complex multi-vendor control issues to be overcome, BTP turned to CCTV control specialists Synectics, who, utilizing their innovative and fully approved TVNP (Television Network Protocol) interface, were able to provide a comprehensive answer via their industry leading SynergyPro control solution.

Tony Holloway, Digital Sales Manager at Synectics takes up the story: "When British Transport Police asked us to get involved, they had access to 600 cameras covering areas of London Underground's station network but to increase their awareness of what was happening beyond the station areas when policing large scale events, felt access to the Westminster scheme's cameras would greatly assist them. Utilizing Synectics' fully developed TVNP interface allowed connectivity to Westminster's cameras for monitoring and control of camera images, allowing strategic surveillance of the exterior areas of key underground stations. The success of the initial systems interfacing led to Synectics technology and equipment being specified to form the core solution for the expansion of the highly complex Silver Control facility."

Inspector Andy Ford, responsible for the overall operation of the BTP control room adds: "Initially, we posed the question of connectivity to Westminster's cameras to a number of technology suppliers, however, it soon became apparent that our needs to interface with a variety of other multi-vendor hardware based CCTV systems would only be reliably met by using the Synectics TVNP interface. The positive results from which led us to work with Synectics on the expansion of Silver Control."



"The development of our TVNP interface has been the key to unlocking access to London's disparate camera networks at BTP", continues Tony Holloway: "Utilizing Synectics' unparalleled depth of specialist interfacing technology has allowed Inspector Ford and his team to select and view over 10,000 cameras from diverse surveillance systems right across the capital."

These diverse sources include, the London Underground, all London mainline railway stations and 28 London boroughs. Silver Commander, Superintendent Ellie Bird explains the advantages of this unique resource: "From the control room, I can access visual information derived from across the city. This information is invaluable to the Gold, Silver and Bronze command structure, giving the vital event or incident information needed to meet both Gold command's strategic aims, and support and deploy Bronze command units to fast changing situations, as appropriate."

"The technology at our disposal in the Silver Control suite provides live visual information from any location around the city, allowing me to make informed decisions on the deployment of resources. This comprehensive visual data also allows us to predict how decisions made will impact on other areas. For example, if we have a large concert attendance at Wembley

Stadium and we need to redirect traffic away from a particularly over crowded tube station or take the decision to 'non-stop' a train through a station at the close of the event, we need to be fully informed of the situation at the next two or three stations down the line. This ensures we are not simply moving the problem from one location to another.

"The car bombs found in the Haymarket area of London on 29th of June this year meant we were forced to close essential elements of the transport infrastructure. However, via live coverage from the control room, we were able to effectively direct police resources on the ground to ensure public safety and minimal disruption."

Deploying two SynergyPro workstations to control the myriad of multi-vendor hardware available for selection by operators at Silver Control has proved to provide each with a fast route to all common system functions. Images are recorded in real-time on 26 channels of the powerful Synectics Modular Digital Recording System (MDRS) server located within the facility, allowing all images viewed in the control room to be recorded for retrospective investigation. It also means Inspector Ford and his team of operators can be confident when tracking on-screen events, that each action taken is fully documented for future reference. If evidential footage

is required for retrospective Transport Police investigation, or to support a prosecution, evidential footage is gathered directly from the participating authorities' recording systems, as Inspector Ford explains: "For example, if an incident had occurred within the City's square mile that required evidential footage, British Transport Police officers would liaise directly with City of London Police to acquire the audited video footage for presentation in court.

"The vast scope of selectable surveillance coverage at our fingertips means professional police assessment can be in 'virtual' attendance at most incidents across the capital, immediately, via our video wall display. During large-scale events we may experience a number of incidents and effective police deployment to those incidents is essential. Key to supporting effective deployment is the SynergyPro CCTV control interface. Intuitive, easy to use and supported by comprehensive training from Synectics, our CCTV operators have developed new working practices to identify and respond to incidents under observation - leading to a smoother, more effective control room operation."

With its fluid and intuitive control, SynergyPro has furnished Silver Control operators with a variety of ways to tailor the way they control common system functions, according to their individual preferences. For example, the way operators choose to switch cameras can vary considerably. Using SynergyPro, a team member can choose between

using the keyboard, innovative 'touch-screen' maps (showing camera locations), or Synectics' unique multi-functional 'Navigator' joystick control unit. Navigator's side-mounted Function buttons can be assigned to control user specific features, such as to enable the selection of the 'Next' camera on a geographical basis i.e. North, South, East or West of the current camera being viewed. A combination of Navigator's Function button and joystick can also be used to select Monitors or DVR playback; to control playback speed and direction. This provides each Silver Control operator with a simple yet highly effective human interface between live camera display and playback control functionality. The highly intuitive navigational control is an essential element to dealing with access to over 10,000 of the capital's cameras and essential to the mission critical monitoring of large-scale events and incidents - where fast decisions are required to effectively police emergency situations.

Established as a key tool for the policing of large-scale events and in support of emergency situations, the Silver Control surveillance facility is to develop with Synectics modularity and expandability at its heart. This development is being driven by the ever-expanding events program in and around the capital, and particularly in the build up to the 2012 London Olympics.

Superintendent Ellie Bird concludes: "The Olympics will see the ultimate challenge in managing the fluid transit of

people across the capital. It will see hundreds of thousands of additional visitors to London over the period of the games, criss-crossing the city to watch events at various locations. The ability to select and view camera images from London's vast surveillance network is an essential element to securing the success of this massive event.

Silver Control now provides an invaluable link between the overall BTP command structure and officers on the ground, and will continue to play a leading role as a primary public safety and security tool, up to and beyond the 2012 Olympics."

PROJECT DETAILS

Client

British Transport Police

Location

London, UK

For further information on the products, services and systems offered by Synectic Systems, visit synecticsglobal.com.

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Literature Reference: CS-BTP/0915/USL Iss 3
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