



# *No More Free Rides: How To Choose a Surveillance System That Earns Its Keep*

by John Katnic

**E**conomic downturns, like the one we're experiencing and others in the past, are brutally Darwinistic. The weak get weaker while survivors get stronger and ultimately flourish. This is true for companies, departments and individuals. Non-producing, revenue draining performers are dead or dying. Those that can generate a return on dollars invested, especially under difficult economic conditions, will be leading the pack when the light shines through the end of the tunnel.

As the economy shrinks, surveillance departments are being forced to operate under a different kind of "budget," assuming they get one. In the affluent years of the recent past, budgets were allocated to expand facilities, improve processes, and increase production capacity. Today's budgets aim to avoid risk, protect cash, cut costs, eliminate waste and, above all, weather the storm and survive. In this constricted business climate, survival is the new definition of success. The temptation to buy cheap fixes, or wait in atrophy while global confidence improves, overshadows traditional business decision-making that is based on long-term value and ROI. Now, more than ever, how we invest limited resources, and what we do with them, are critical to succeeding in the post-recession economy. For those planning to be here when the ice thaws, following are some tips for choosing a surveillance system that can turn your department into a productive, revenue-generating arm of the organization.

### **Leverage Your Legacy Equipment**

In periods of rapid technology advances, casinos often make large capital investments in disparate systems, resulting in costly inefficiencies, complexity and waste. A comprehensive video management and command and control platform that can integrate analogue matrices, IP and Megapixel cameras with digital video recorders, and/or process security alarms without replacing legacy equipment is key to maximizing your past, present and future technology investment.

Make sure that the prospective system is flexible and scalable providing a roadmap for accommodating future technologies. Does the software support multiple third-party manufacturers, platforms and industries? Is it backward compatible with a previous version or does it require "trash-can" upgrades? Does the supplier release regular upgrades based on customer requests? Is the product widely supported by national and local resellers? Is the technology based on mainstream software and hardware that can be

supported by third-party technicians and integrators?

Ideally, choose a system that plays well with others rather than one that requires starting from scratch. Investing in a proprietary system means for the life of that system, replacements, service, expansions and upgrades must all come from the same manufacturer, leaving little room to bargain or reevaluate. In contrast, going with a non-proprietary system that accommodates a range of technology brands ensures longevity and flexibility.

### **Invest in Video Productivity**

Today's surveillance systems have to manage an overwhelming amount of data, different types of alarm systems and an overabundance of cameras. Consider that only a small portion of recorded video actually holds incidental value. With this in mind, look for a system that offers an intelligent video management system that can sift through the noise and deliver relevant, actionable content. Make sure the interface is easy to use and provides a seamless method for managing incidents and generating reports so that new operators are up to speed and productive quickly.

Look for systems that seamlessly integrate surveillance video to third-party security and transaction systems. Done correctly, connecting alarm or transaction databases to video can help operators anticipate and prevent problems before they occur, identify repeat offenders, speed up audits, and enable quicker response to accidents, fire, intrusion, scams and other potentially threatening situations.

Cheats and thieves cause significant profit loss and perpetrators strive to stay one step ahead of surveillance. By investing in specific systems integrations designed to mitigate known scams, returned revenue can easily justify the cost, and more. Video productivity software represents a powerful new surveillance tool that generates more intelligent information for forensic reviews, customer behavior, and marketing opportunities. This kind of advanced, integrated data analysis is only made possible when combining, correlating and reporting information from discrete surveillance, security, accounting, gaming and CRM systems through a unified command and control application.

### **Make an Educated Decision**

Seek out recommendations from a diverse range of industry experts and colleagues, but take them all with a grain of salt. Ultimately, you will need a hands-on evaluation to determine what system is best for your facility. Schedule a

side-by-side demo comparison with three to four leading systems providers so you can review relative video quality and functionality. Ask each vendor to state in writing the resolution (CIF, 4CIF), data rate (1, 2, 3 Mbit/second) and frame rate (15, 30 FPS) that their demo system is displaying, and again, ask each participating vendor to standardize for the demo. Use the same camera, monitor, cable outs, etc. to ensure you get a true apples-to-apples comparison.

Rate each system on video quality, ease of use, flexibility, key/unique features, reliability, integration, personnel, service plan, price, references, etc. Get as many opinions as possible from your operators, regulators, management and directors. Nothing is more costly than buying the wrong system and replacing it a year or two later. So measure twice and cut once.

The request for proposal (RFP) process should be equally rigorous and systematic. Write a detailed RFP including the hardware, software and service specifications with the aid of a trained consultant or advisor. Be as precise as possible when describing camera counts, resolution, frame rates, infrastructure and integration expectations, manufacturer preferences, scope of work and timetables.

### Factor Technical Support into the Productivity Equation

Once you narrow down the system choice, pick the right jockey for the horse. Select a manufacturer and integrator that has experience installing, integrating and servicing enterprise class systems in casinos. It's important that they understand the regulations, challenges and nuances unique to the gaming industry. They should also have practical expertise with CCTV, Digital/IP and Command Control Software. Today's enterprise class solutions are large, complex, multi-manufacturer, multi-platform systems that require traditional camera cabling as well as contemporary computer, networking and software skill sets.

Ask detailed questions about the service and support plan such as: Who is responsible for what? What are the response times? Are spares included? Is there automated failover? How fast does it work and in what conditions? Are software updates included? How often? What about on-site or return to factory repairs? Visit at least three reference sites and speak with surveillance directors and technicians in private about their experience before choosing. Every system has problems. The key is how they're addressed.

Support extends beyond fixing things. Seek a partner that is interested in growing with you and developing new features and capabilities that meet your needs and enhance their product at the same time. In this business, the pilot is every bit as important as the plane.

### Be a Visionary

During the Great Depression, Drs. Ralph Falk and Donald Baxter brought intravenous medical treatments to the masses and their company, Baxter International, has since grown into a \$37 billion company. Southwest Airlines, FedEx, Microsoft and Oracle were all born out of the "stagflation" era (high inflation with stunted growth) of the 1970s. The point is, during challenging times, the weak fall by the wayside, but the strong set eyes on the opportunity and rise to the top.

Find smarter ways to generate return on your surveillance investment and avoid ending up as road kill. Start planning now for the inevitable regeneration that's just around the corner. ♣

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