

Choosing the Right Video Surveillance System: It Depends on Why You're Watching

Convincing your kids that you have eyes in the back of your head might work to deter bad behavior, but it's likely a less effective strategy for keeping everyone in line at work, and I doubt it will discourage any criminals. A video surveillance system can do many things, but doing any one of them well is heavily dependent on the equipment you use.

There are some basic questions that anyone considering installing a video surveillance system should ask:

Should cameras be hidden or visible?

It depends on the application. Most common are visible cameras to allow for appropriate coverage, viewing angles, distance and night vision.

Where does the privacy of an employee come in - how do you know if you are violating any laws?

Certain states have laws that require a sign advising that the premises are under video and audio surveillance. It is the responsibility of the person/company to check the laws of their local jurisdiction.

Being able to watch one's business is good but the camera only helps AFTER the crime, unless one happens to be monitoring the business all the time. How is this addressed?

Video surveillance is used for multiple purposes, not only for crime prosecution. For example, live monitoring (e.g. did an employee show up to work? was the garbage picked up?), recording (e.g. end of day closing procedure at a fast food restaurant), archiving (backing up information that is important such as transactions at the cash register), public viewing (e.g. making people aware that they are being seen, for their safety but also as a deterrence method).

How does one choose the right surveillance system for their business? There are so many options.

This is a very complex question. The first criteria is how many cameras need to be supported (4, 8 or 16). The next step is to determine whether recording is required and what storage capacity is needed along with remote monitoring over the internet. Finally the selection of camera and extension cables is important (indoor/outdoor, night vision, viewing angles etc).

What are the differences between a traditional CCTV and more web based cameras connected to one's network?

The differences are significant and this alone is a topic for a complete article. There are advantages and disadvantages to each. To name a few:

Traditional Closed Circuit TV:

- Analog
- Recording to a DVR (Digital Video Recorder)
- The number of cameras is limited by the number of recording channels of the system

Network cameras:

- Digital
- Record to a PC, Server or NVR (Network Video Recorder)
- Scalable
- Heavy on bandwidth
- Typically more expensive
- Requires different infrastructure (cabling, switches, servers)

We are seeing a slow transition to network cameras and first appearance of hybrid systems (combination of analog and IP)

Are there experts one can hire to assist with installing the system? Can one's local techie do it or should a licensed "security expert" do it?

As in every field there are installation services and experts. Also there are a number of outlets that sell do-it-yourself products. These products are typically designed for home use and will provide only limited coverage. If your needs are for your business then you should talk with a professional installer. They can show you the differences in cameras and other system components and help you find the ones that best meets your needs and budget.