

JUSTICE SURVEYED

Gateway security solution helps Washington County, Ark., watch over its courthouse and other public buildings.



*Steve Kizzar,
computer systems
administrator,
Washington County, Ark.*

A video surveillance system has watched over the courthouse in Washington County, Ark., for years. Unfortunately the grainy black-and-white images viewed on tiny display screens provided video security ranging from barely adequate to nearly useless. Even worse, records kept on old-fashioned VCR tapes were difficult to review, access and store.

Now those days are gone. Washington County's new Gateway-enabled security system features vivid color images rendered on a 42-inch plasma screen monitor.

"This is a night-and-day difference for the county," said Steve Kizzar, computer systems administrator for Washington County. "Our security guards can see everything that's happening in the courthouse as well as in several other county buildings."

Located in Fayetteville, the Washington County courthouse serves more than 150,000 residents in an area of more than 950 square miles. County officials want to maintain security at the county courthouse, while ensuring the facility remains friendly to citizens.

"Our County Judge doesn't want our courthouse to look too militaristic," said Kizzar, noting the structure includes neither metal detectors nor x-ray machines. "We have guards who will stop anyone who looks or acts suspicious, but we don't want our courthouse to look like a fortress."

LOCAL HOMELAND SECURITY

Kizzar's IT team used funds from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to help pay for the new video security system.

"A portion of the homeland security grant monies received by the county were designated for use in updating government building security," Kizzar said. "It turned out the amount of money we needed to implement the Gateway system was almost exactly the amount we had set aside in homeland security grant money."

With billions of dollars in homeland security grants currently available to states, counties and cities, the ability to enhance critical surveillance systems of all sizes is now more possible than ever. The Gateway solution is not only cutting-edge in its design, but can also save precious budget dollars by reducing the number of multiple on- and off-site personnel necessary to maintain optimum security levels.

The county began investigating video surveillance systems based on standard DVR (digital video recorder) technology. Then Kizzar's Gateway representative showed him the company's unique server-based approach to security, and Kizzar was intrigued.

When Washington County issued an RFP for the project, Gateway's solution met the requirements.

"There are a lot of surveillance companies out there, but most are supplying typical DVR solutions," explained Kizzar. "If you looked at our RFP, standard DVR systems just couldn't meet the specifications."

CUSTOMER PROFILE

AGENCY:

Washington County, Ark., Information Technology Department.

MISSION:

The IT department implements and manages technology throughout Washington County government.

OBJECTIVE:

Improve security and surveillance at the county courthouse, juvenile detention facility parking lot and Department of Emergency Management offices.

GATEWAY SOLUTION:

The county's cutting-edge surveillance system features a Gateway plasma screen monitor, Gateway 980 server, two E-4100 workstations, video capture cards, network switches

and an AIT-3 digital tape drive that support virtually unlimited video camera feeds. The solution records, retrieves and indexes multiple video feeds from camera locations as much as five miles apart. Gateway servers provide instant recording and back-up of data from every position on the network. The Gateway server's digital tape drive provides a high-speed, high-capacity, automatic tape backup system ideal for mission-critical applications.

INNOVATIVE ANSWERS

Working with Datacom Systems of Hot Springs, Ark., as the project integrator, Washington County implemented the new surveillance system, which features the Gateway plasma screen, a Gateway 980 server, two E-4100 workstations, video capture cards, network switches and an AIT-3 digital tape drive.

The flexible system accommodates virtually unlimited camera feeds into the existing network. Advanced capabilities allow it to record, retrieve and index multiple video feeds from camera locations as far as five miles apart. The use of server-class equipment provides remarkably strong stability for the surveillance and security solution.

Now, security officers maintain constant surveillance via 21 cameras located in hallways and public areas of the Washington County courthouse. Cameras also are deployed at the juvenile detention facility parking lot and another is stationed in the county's Department of Emergency Management (DEM) about four miles away.

MASSIVE MEMORY

After several months of service, Kizzar said the county courthouse's main server hard drive system is not yet full.

"We can set our cameras to react only when there is motion so they are not continually recording," Kizzar explained. "That way we are not wasting storage space by recording hours of empty hallways."

The cameras at the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) run constantly, and Kizzar admitted, "Space fills up pretty quickly there." But he also said, "archiving is no problem," because of the high-speed, high-capacity, automatic tape backup system provided by the Gateway server's AIT-3 digital tape drive.

Security officers regularly view feeds from 16 different courthouse cameras simultaneously — but have the capability to view all 24 feeds at once, including those from the juvenile detention facility or DEM building. Officers can zoom, tilt and pan cameras remotely as needed. The officer located in the juvenile detention facility receives continual feed from the camera outside that building.

The new system creates AVI files from the video feeds, which can be easily e-mailed to law enforcement officials or others if necessary.

NEW VISIBILITY

The advanced technology improves the safety of everyone who visits the courthouse, juvenile detention facility or DEM, and it provides clear evidence in the event of an incident.

"If something bad should happen, say, when a prisoner is being escorted to a courtroom, security would see it immediately, and we would have a

permanent, accurate record of the incident," Kizzar explained.

The system already proved beneficial on two occasions. In one incident, a woman rushed up to a courthouse security guard claiming her ex-husband — against whom she had a restraining order — was harassing her in the parking lot. Upon reviewing video records that cover virtually every square inch of the parking facility, guards saw nothing to corroborate the woman's story, and the episode ended there.

"Prior to implementing this system, if someone said something happened in the parking lot, what could we have done?" asked Kizzar. "There was no way to say 'yes' or 'no.'"

In another incident, officials used security images to help obtain funding for long-needed elevator repairs after the video system recorded a woman tripping as she exited an elevator that had stopped inches below her designated floor.

The new system could save the county, "who knows how much in a lawsuit situation," Kizzar said.

GOING WITH GATEWAY

Noting Gateway's reputation for reliability, affordability and service, Kizzar said he was confident the surveillance system would prove robust and effective.

"When I first began working for Washington County seven years ago, I knew we needed to standardize on good machines," said Kizzar. "So we started buying Gateway desktops and laptops, and we've been a Gateway shop ever since."

Kizzar's enthusiasm for Gateway's security solution seems to be spreading.

Washington County is building a new jail that should be complete by the end of the year. Officials at the jail had planned to deploy surveillance technology similar to the old courthouse system, but after seeing the new courthouse deployment, they chose the Gateway security solution.

"They will be able to use the camera system they have already purchased," explained Kizzar. "But they are now going to use this kind of Gateway storage system."

The decision to switch to Gateway doesn't surprise Kizzar.

"This system is almost too good," he said. "It makes everything so clear and so interesting, all you want to do is watch the video feed."

Kizzar happily shows off the solution to other officials both inside and outside the county.

"Sometimes things just come together," said Kizzar. "With the homeland security funding and our Gateway rep presenting this idea to us, the new surveillance system just came together perfectly. Everybody loves it."

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