

The concept of remotely monitored CCTV has been around for over a decade, but technical developments have enabled CCTV surveillance systems to take a sizable step forwards. In this article Barry Faiers, who recently retired from Allianz Cornhill Insurance, considers the role of detector activated remotely monitored CCTV systems and the implications for the role of the 'night watchman'.



Tools and Technology

For many years as an insurance surveyor, part of my role was to advise companies how best to manage the security of their premises. The arsenal of tools at my disposal included locks, safes, alarms and guards, usually deployed in that order. Like most security professionals I saw the building and its perimeter like the skins of an onion; the perimeter being the outer layer, followed by the building and finally the high value items inside. This layered approach to protection is easily understood by most people and it has stood the test of time.

Alas, we cannot stand still as new, more

sophisticated, tools are constantly being added to the toolbox. These new technologies challenge our preconceived ideas and force us to review our methods of working and our attitude towards security. From my perspective, one of the most interesting and exciting developments of recent times is detector activated, remotely monitored CCTV systems - I will refer to these as DATV for short. The code of practice covering the installation of such systems is BS 8418: 2003 Installation and remote monitoring of detector activated CCTV systems.

As with all new technology there tends, initially at least, to be more questions than answers, as understanding of how these systems work and the role that they can play in security protection, can be slow to diffuse. It may also be more difficult for some of those immersed in the ways of the 'old school' to adapt to the new, especially if it results in some of the tried and tested techniques being dispensed with.

The Remote Night Watchman

To consider DATV as just another type of intruder alarm would fail to do justice to this technology. DATV represents a huge leap forwards and to my mind it creates a chasm between existing intruder alarm systems and DATV's capability if properly deployed. It may take some time for the stalwarts of the intruder alarm industry to recognise the potential that DATV offers. To me DATV is best described as a 'remote night watchman'; one who always turns up on time and never sleeps or reads the paper whilst on duty. In terms of cost comparison therefore, it is more representative to equate DATV with manned guarding on-site, rather than to the cost of a passive intruder alarm system.

From a cost viewpoint, the cameras, detectors and control equipment, much of which will need to be suitable for outdoor use in all weathers, associated with DATV are more expensive than intruder alarm equipment. In addition, extra lighting may be required on site, or existing lighting may need to be modified or moved to give the required illumination.

Correct installation of equipment needs care and setting up the system and checking images at the remote video receiving centre (RVRC) takes a lot of time, and requires on site testing during the hours of darkness.

The installation of a DATV system requires a level of expertise and experience that differs greatly from the tradition skills associated with intruder alarm systems. Unlike the trap protection usually provided by intruder alarms, DATV installations cover the whole site by detectors and cameras.

RVRC monitoring is completely different (in terms of time and skill) to that provided by an Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC). As a consequence it is more costly, but I believe the customer gets a lot more for their money. Unlike an operator at an ARC, an operator at a RVRC has to take time to view images and then decide what action to take. There is no right and wrong answer as there is with an intruder alarm system, just shades of grey that demand a judgement on what action to take.

DATV and IAS - No Comparison

What I find difficult to understand is why installers drive down the price of DATV by comparing it to an intruder alarm system (IAS). Why not drive the price up by comparing it to manned guarding? If DATV is priced against manned guarding, while the initial cost may appear high, in my recent experience, it will usually pay for itself in less than two years and then show significant savings thereafter for the life of the system. By creating a price comparison between DATV and an IAS, there is a temptation to cut corners in order to reduce the price. This will inevitably impact upon the quality and quantity of equipment used, which in turn drives down profit.

It is not surprising that the more successful installers and monitors of DATV come not from the intruder alarm industry but from the CCTV industry. I think that this is because the CCTV industry better understands the need for whole site coverage and the need to sell a quality system at a reasonable profit to a willing purchaser. I realise that not all purchasers rush to get their cheque books out, but in my experience most purchasers of DATV see the benefits that they are getting for their money. Usually they are going to make savings on site guarding, they know they will benefit from coverage of the whole site rather than just what the guard(s) can see, and the DATV doesn't turn up late or sleep on the job. The purchaser usually also gets the ability to use a DATV system himself, seeing what the cameras can see. It can even let him dial into the site from a laptop anywhere in the world. An intruder alarm on the other hand is usually regarded as a grudge purchase forced on the client as a consequence of a break-in, or by an insurance company as a condition of cover.

DATV allows a rationalised approach

To return to my original analogy, which of the onion skins can be dispensed with if a DATV system is deployed? Are static guards still required? If they are, then it is almost certain that their number or hours can be reduced. But remember the guard will need to be stationed in a position where he will not set off detectors on his way to the toilet or to make a cup of tea. Is an intruder alarm still required if all approaches to the building are covered by DATV? Surely a visitor to the site will be picked up and monitored before reaching the building? Even with sensitive contents, a few strategically placed detectors and related cameras can cover the same areas as an intruder alarm and give more information to the RVRC.

I actually do not advocate lessening the physical security to a site or building. There is no guarantee that a voice warning from a loud speaker will deter the most determined intruder, or that a response from a mobile patrol or the police will be able to attend in a reasonable time. I suggest that the use of DATV presents an opportunity to question established ideas and it creates a potentially better form of security protection which should not be ignored.

