

Protecting Plato's Closet with Axis video.

West Des Moines store migrates from analog to hosted video to in-house IP to reduce theft below one percent.



Organization:
Plato's Closet

Location:
West Des Moines, Iowa,
USA

Industry segment:
Retail

Application:
Loss prevention, safety
and security

Axis partners:
ICS Advanced
Technologies, Salient
Systems, Dell, Iomega

Mission

Plato's Closet puts a luxurious spin on the typical consignment store concept: customers buy and sell brand-name, high-end clothing and accessories. Buyers in each independently-owned store determine product price based on an item's brand, condition and the store's current stock levels. Steve Olson, franchisee of the successful West Des Moines, Iowa store, saw their retail space grow from 2,000 sq. ft. to a 7,000 sq. ft. megastore in just a few years, and the analog system could not keep pace. They sought a system that could deliver crystal-clear video detail and grow alongside their thriving business.

Solution

ICS Advanced Technologies, an Ames, Iowa-based provider of technology solutions ranging from Internet services to audio/video installations to security and surveillance solutions, designed a tailor-made IP video system based on Salient System's CompleteView VMS platform that strategically morphed to meet Plato's Closet's changing security and loss prevention needs.

ICS began with an encoder solution to migrate the store to an IP backbone, then shifted to a hosted video solution with redundant Iomega Network Attached Storage as new IP cameras were added, and then fully converted Plato's Closet to an all-IP Dell-server solution to add more functionality and high-definition cameras, including the covert AXIS P8514 Network Camera.

Result

The IP video system, which now covers more than 90% of the 7,000 sq. ft. store, has helped reduce theft to less than one percent. Video evidence has been invaluable in catching customers attempting to sell stolen goods, and the high-quality video even helps settle disputes over the amount of cash that exchanged hands in a given transaction. Remote video allows the Olsons to keep the store running smoothly when they are at home or on the road, and proves an important training tool for their staff. The store has also built an excellent relationship with the Des Moines-area police and video evidence has helped put more than a few people in jail, including busting up an organized retail crime ring.

"Our system has helped put a few people in jail. The police are very supportive of our efforts."

Steve Olson, owner, Plato's Closet in West Des Moines, Iowa.

This Closet is bursting

At Plato's Closet, each location's franchisee bargains with customers for the store's inventory: gently used brand name clothing and accessories. In this cash-heavy, bargaining atmosphere where luxury items line the racks, surveillance is at a premium. Steve Olson, franchisee of the West Des Moines, Iowa, Plato's Closet, owns one of the top-grossing outlets in the nation. What started out as a 2000 sq. ft. location has more than tripled in size, and Olson's responsibilities of inventory control, security and loss prevention have grown proportionally.

"We've talked to managers at major store brands and their head offices tell them not to even bother attempting to reduce shrinkage. Of course they try to minimize it as much as they can, but they resign to the fact that if you can't stop it, just build it into the cost of the merchandise," shares Olson. "Our goal is to have shrinkage rates as low as humanly possible."

Unfortunately, his analog system couldn't deliver the results he wanted nor could it keep pace with the store's growth. "The store was expanding every two years, and the most recent upgrade called for an increase from 12 to 24 cameras," said Patrick Bailey, president of ICS Advanced Technologies, the Ames, Iowa-based integrator chosen by Plato's Closet. "Most importantly, however, was getting rid of six analog cameras and offering higher resolution with IP cameras."

From analog to hybrid to hosted to in-house

ICS suggested a gradual transition to IP video. The first step was to digitize the few working analog cameras with two four-channel AXIS 241Q Video Encoders and install new AXIS M3203 Fixed Dome Network Cameras with SVGA resolution. With the small camera count of this original hybrid system, using a server-based solution would have been costly for Plato's Closet. Fortunately, as a local Internet Service Provider, ICS had the perfect solution: hosted video. It was an ingenious idea that leveraged Salient System's CompleteView Enterprise VMS and an Iomega NAS device for high-definition redundancy.

ICS immediately improved the store's resolution and system functionality, and remote monitoring became a favorite feature of the Olsons. "My wife can see all the cameras in action from our home computer or if we're on the road. With a quick phone call, she can make sure the store's running a tight ship even when we're not there."

Remote diagnostics was another major advantage of moving to IP. "If the system needs to be tweaked or upgraded, we're able to do so remotely from our desks close to 99% of the time," says Bailey. "I can respond to Steve's needs much faster and keep his system up and running."

Full-fledged IP with a covert twist

"Because of the success we've seen, we decided to invest quite a bit of money in the security system," Olson said. "We wanted to be aggressive against theft and work jointly with law enforcement to stop shoplifting and vandalism."

As the system has grown, they've added HDTV-quality AXIS M3204 Fixed Dome Network Cameras and installed a Dell server-based solution that continues to run Salient's CompleteView. With scalability in mind, ICS has covered more than 90% of the 7,000 sq. ft. store and can add intelligent functionality as the store's LP and security needs evolve. Video detail has settled buyer disputes over the denomination of bills that exchanged hands in a deal, as well as helped local police thwart an organized retail crime ring involving teenaged girls recruited to sell stolen goods.

Most recently, the store added the covert AXIS P8514 Network Camera, whose 720p HDTV clarity and unique eye-level position delivered perfect face shots to help capture a known local shoplifter as well as settle a family dispute of a mother who believed her eldest daughter was stealing and reselling her sister's clothes. Despite the advice from industry colleagues to let shrink take its natural course, Olson has been able to cut shoplifting below 1%. "Our system has helped put a few people in jail," Olson said with a smile. "The police are very supportive of our efforts."



PLATO'S
CLOSET

ICS

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iomega
an EMC company

DELL