

Essex Police are using live video to strengthen its 999 response

Essex Police is using BT Security Solutions' Video Image Sharing technology to bring real-time CCTV image feeds from local authority CCTV systems into its central command and control centre, helping to increase both the speed and quality of police response to incidents

“The BT video sharing solution means that our dispatchers can see exactly what’s going on. It is a very useful tool. The system has already been instrumental in saving officers from serious harm”

Stuart Ashton, Operations Superintendent,
Communications Division, Essex Police



Live CCTV images being received at the Chelmsford police dispatcher's desk in the Force Information Room

Essex Police needed to show live CCTV images from several local authority managed CCTV Control Rooms in the county, directly to the desks of the operational dispatch staff within its central command and control centre, the Force Information Room (FIR), in Chelmsford.

The FIR is the central receiving centre for all calls from members of the public – including 999 calls, and it is also responsible for dispatching police officers to incidents across the county.

This solution includes reliably and securely transmitting real-time broadcast-quality CCTV image data to the FIR from CCTV cameras in towns around the county to include Colchester, Braintree, Harlow, Loughton, Thurrock, Basildon, Rayleigh, Southend and Chelmsford.

Stuart Ashton is Operations Superintendent, Communications Division, Essex Police, whose responsibility includes the FIR.

He explains, “Previously we’d receive a call – say a report of fighting in one of the town centres – and we wouldn’t be able to see the incident. Often the local authority CCTV centre would be our initial informant, having picked up the incident on their cameras. Often they could see the incident, and we needed our staff to have the same ability, to help us to better judge the appropriate police response.”

In 2007 Essex Police began a trial with BT involving the transmission of CCTV image data from Southend Council’s CCTV control room to the FIR in Chelmsford.

How it works

Analogue CCTV images are transmitted from Southend Council’s CCTV Control Room to Southend Police Station using a BT Redcare Fibre link. At Southend Police station the video images are encoded to a digital signal, using BT’s i-Witness encoding equipment.

The digital image stream is then transmitted to the FIR in Chelmsford via the BT managed Cellstream network that connects all Essex Police sites.

Great results

The Southend trial is proving extremely successful. Says Stuart, “The system has been instrumental in saving officers from serious harm. For example, we had a situation where a police dog handler was dealing with a disturbance when he came under attack. Even though he was unable to radio for help, we could actually see what was happening and we were able to quickly send additional officers to the scene.”

That’s just one dramatic example, but the system is also regularly proving its worth in more routine situations: in dealing with bag thefts, shoplifting, helping to quickly find missing persons and stolen cars, and in helping to ensure the safety of vulnerable individuals.

“We’ve also used the system on more than one occasion to monitor people who we think may be attempting suicide,” says Stuart. “In some cases it’s meant we’ve been able to pick them up quite early, so the system has probably already saved lives.”

The BT system has been successfully used to help catch a group of cash-in-transit robbers. “We saw a man and a woman snatch the cash-bag in the centre of Southend, we alerted the council CCTV room, and we were able to track them until we were able to intercept them and they were arrested,” says Stuart. “By the time the security staff from the cash van dialed 999 we were able to tell them that we’d already caught the robbers. They just couldn’t believe we’d caught them so quickly. It was brilliant!”

In another incident, the FIR desk were able to identify, on their CCTV screen, a man sitting in a car in the town centre carrying a rifle with a telescopic sight. “Using cameras we were able to follow him when he drove off and eventually corner his vehicle and make an arrest,” says Stuart. “And it all happened in front of us on the desk of the police dispatcher co-ordinating the operation to contain the suspect.”

Future development

Following the success of the Southend installation, Essex Police bid and successfully won capital expenditure from central police funds to establish further live CCTV transmission links from the other main public space surveillance CCTV systems in the county to the Chelmsford police control centre.

Systems connecting the Colchester, Harlow and Chelmsford local authority CCTV Control Rooms to the police FIR went live in mid-December 2008 with the remaining locations to be added quickly thereafter.

Stuart is very pleased with the BT CCTV system: “It’s looking good,” he says. “The system has been running 24 hours a day 7 days a week 365 days a year for over two years now and we’ve never had any problem with it. In all that time the solution has never once failed and neither have we had any issues with quality of the images being received.”

“The BT Security Solutions Video Sharing System is a very useful tool for us,” he concludes.

BT Security Solutions’ Video Image Sharing system offers:

- Help to ensure appropriate police incident categorisation and response
- Improved efficiency of police dispatch teams
- Provision of additional level of security for police officers attending a scene
- Efficient identification of suspects at the scene and police at the scene can be aided in real time with information viewed on CCTV prior to their arrival at the scene
- A cost effective solution making use of existing IP networks
- A seamless integration with the existing analogue or digital fibre CCTV infrastructure
- A real-time broadcast quality video images
- A streamed CCTV from either live feed or from data of previous incidents stored by the local authority CCTV control room
- A secure log-on, full audit trail and conformity with Data Protection
- System installation and maintenance by BT Security Solutions
- A fully-managed and service-wrapped solutions – including 24/7 service desk, remote diagnostics, guaranteed four hour response time for faults and annual on-site health checks



Offices Worldwide

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