

EXCLUSIVE! CCTV Becomes One of Hollywood's Brightest Stars

by Chris Reed

On a street that is synonymous with show business, it isn't the equipment that make the public CCTV system on Hollywood Boulevard shine like a star ... it's the cooperation between an integrator, a group of businesses and the police that deserves a starring role.

Since March, a surveillance system of five cameras wirelessly connected to a police station have been keeping an eye on one of the most famous streets in America — protecting the tourists, aspiring actors and other colorful figures who walk on the terrazzo stars that make up the Walk of Fame. With homeland security on everyone's mind four years after 9/11, the showcase of show business is being well protected.

In the short time it has been in operation, the Hollywood CCTV system has made a significant dent in the number of criminals who stroll on a street where people from all walks of life gather.

But none of that would have happened if not for an alliance between the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), a consortium of local business owners and El Segundo, Calif.-based security contractor Metro Video Systems Inc. The three entities put any possible differences aside to dedicate themselves to making Hollywood Boulevard a safer place.

"It's a partnership to make our area safer and it's a close-knit group," says Dan Chismire, assistant general manager in charge of security for the Hollywood & Highland entertainment and retail complex that houses the Kodak Theatre, site of the Academy Awards. "This mixture has been fantastic. Other communities should take heed. It's been an eye-opening experience for me."

Living up to the glitz and the glamour that is Hollywood, the public CCTV collaboration has been a leading example of how public and private entities can work together to protect their community. A big factor for the installer in bringing all sides together proved to not only be its long experience with CCTV systems, but also its ability to explain the installation in a way that even Rin Tin Tin could understand.

The result has been a system that, even with the monitors barely warm, has led to a multitude of arrests. The system itself doesn't rank high in complexity, but it has risen to the top of the box office when it comes to securing the stars.

Camera System Helps Bring Tinsel Back to Tinseltown

A "HOC" now watches over Hollywood Boulevard.

Located inside a small room of LAPD's Hollywood station is the Hollywood Operations Center (HOC), which serves as the hub of operations for the Hollywood CCTV system.

Compared to all the high-tech surveillance systems seen in some of the films that come out of Hollywood, the HOC is unglamorous. Five Pelco monitors sit on a nondescript rack. The other files and ruffled papers around the room give the HOC a look similar to an unkempt storage room that happens to house sophisticated monitors, matrix

switchers and DVRs.

Each monitor describes which part of Hollywood Boulevard is being looked at. Standing in the room, Todd Byer, who led the design of the system and manages it for Metro Video, points at a vacant payphone on one of the monitors.

Until the system was installed, police say there was always a line of drug dealers at the phone trying to make a score. Now, instead of a crowd of criminals, there is nothing around the phone except the occasional tourists walking around face down, looking for the star of Britney Spears.

Officers who man the HOC are losing count of the number of arrests the system has contributed to. Evidence of those nabblings can be found on a clipboard in the room. On it is page after page of arrests, ranging from disturbing the peace to attempted murder.

"Just from a copper standpoint, if I get three to four parolees off the board, we've just reduced crime a great deal," says LAPD Sgt. Robert Miles. "In the long term, if a parolee is arrested and finds out he was on camera, he's never coming back."

The famous street is not only the site of movie premiers and the Oscars, but has also been a gathering place for some of the less stellar members of society. It has long been a destination for teenage runaways as well as ex-cons and parolees. These unsavory elements have been a hindrance on a decade-long effort to revitalize the area to better live up to people's fantasies of Tinseltown.

For years, many came to Hollywood with one vision in mind, only to find scummy characters, boarded-up shops and graffiti. Many were surprised that when they came to Hollywood, they couldn't find "Hollywood."

The efforts of city leaders and local businesses have led to a revitalization that has included the construction of the Hollywood & Highland complex. But even with the shiny new polish, the dregs of society remained.

The CCTV system seems to have finally wiped that slate clean and is giving a sense of safety to visitors, and a life to the boulevard that it hasn't seen in years.

"Hollywood should be synonymous with no disappointments," Chismire says. "There were a number of illicit activities, drug deals that were soliciting people away from this area. Where the cameras have been installed, we are not seeing that activity anymore. As an ex-Marine, I can take care of myself but I still feel safer."

Spirit of Cooperation Brings Police, Businesses Together

The genesis of the Hollywood system lies five miles southeast at MacArthur Park. An eight-camera public CCTV system for use by the LAPD was installed in early 2004 at the park in the notorious Rampart district, known for its rampant drug peddling, gang activity and murder rate. The system has been credited with more than 600 arrests and cutting crime by nearly 75 percent.

The MacArthur Park project came about because of a public-private partnership between the LAPD, local businesses

and GE Infrastructure, Security, which donated the equipment.

With crime continuing to put the cuffs on the revitalization of Hollywood, police and business officials in the area saw MacArthur Park as an inspiration.

“We took a tour and we were blown away,” says Kerry Morrison, executive director of the Hollywood Entertainment District Business Improvement District (HEDBID), which was formed in 1996. “The whole reason we formed our organization was crime. It was holding back revitalization. Until the people could feel safe, they would not shop here.”

Security plays a big part in the strategy for HEDBID, made up of business and tourist attraction owners in the area. Of HEDBID’s \$2.3 million budget, \$1.1 million had been earmarked for security personnel. The consortium is one of the few BIDs in the nation with an armed force of private security guards, known as the “Green Team.”

Along for the ride with Morrison during the MacArthur Park tour was LAPD Capt. Mike Downing. The two later arrived at a decision to work together to bring a public CCTV system to Hollywood Boulevard. HEDBID would pay for the equipment and installation, then donate it to the LAPD.

“I was impressed when I found out that businesses were on board and willing to purchase it,” says LAPD’s Miles. “That’s the kind of thing we want.”

The BID hired a consultant from the FBI in the middle of 2004 to help it find the right vendor to install and service the system. That long search eventually led to Metro Video Systems.

“It was a six- to eight-month process. Metro was heads and tails above everyone,” Morrison says. “We wanted premium equipment. If this was going to be done, it was going to be done right.”

Metro soon joined in the cooperative effort and the union was complete: an alarm company, police and businesses all working together.

Video Security Brings Peace of Mind to Hollywood Blvd.

It didn’t take long for the coalition of police and business owners to find out just how effective their new system was going to be.

Metro set up a test camera in January. Just 20 minutes after it went online, it contributed to its first arrest. Since then, Morrison and police officials say the cameras have contributed to more than 100 arrests. On top of that, the LAPD has found uses for the system beyond providing security, including creating video that assists in training officers.

“Just from a training standpoint, there are many uses we didn’t expect,” says LAPD Sgt. Tony Oddo, a member of the Hollywood Vice Squad.

An attempt is made to have the HOC manned by an experienced officer 24 hours a day, though the reality of staffing and budgets can sometimes leave the HOC chair empty. Sgt. Miles says the officer in the HOC acts as a kind of dispatcher. If they see suspicious activity, or someone of suspicion, they can direct LAPD and Green team officers to intercept. Similar to the LAPD’s helicopter fleet, they can also serve as an eye in the sky to track a suspect.

"Experienced officers monitor the boulevard. If there's enough reasonable suspicion, they'll detain them," Miles says.

The eagle eye of the HOC has brought the same kind of security and peace of mind to Hollywood that is experienced by home security systems. There are even the equivalents of yard signs, with signs posted telling all that they are under video surveillance by the LAPD.

With more development coming and more tourists clamoring to put their hands in the handprints at the Chinese Theatre, video security will help Hollywood Boulevard truly shine again.

"This system, combined with the system we have, has given us a wider scope of protection. We have a heads-up on what's coming in," Hollywood & Highland's Chismire says. "With this expanded capability to be safe, why would you want to be without this?"

For the complete story, see the September print issue of Security Sales & Integration.

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