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Outdoor surveillance: new security trends to match the harsh South African outdoors

By Dominic Bruning, marketing director, EMEA, Axis Communications

Outdoor security is essential for many businesses, with the outdoor perimeter of a site often representing an important security gateway. The threshold between the company's land and the space beyond presents a clear opportunity to implement video surveillance technology. Outdoor security systems provide the first view of visitors, intruders or other members of the public, providing the most time to react effectively, if needed.

Alastair Hayfield, Senior Market Research Analyst at IMS Research, believes that robust, efficient outdoor surveillance is becoming more and more important to security professionals. "IMS Research is forecasting long-term double digit revenue growth for applications that require outdoor surveillance, particularly public area surveillance and perimeter protection," he says.

Overview surveillance. Perimeter protection. Facial identification. License plate recognition. For many industries, from health care and government to industry and retail, outdoor surveillance is just as essential to their overall security picture as the indoor system. Often, more so. Each outdoor application has special demands, but successful video surveillance demands suitable image quality and equipment reliability regardless of conditions, as well as cost-effective installation and user-friendly operation.

"It is imperative that outdoor cameras have the highest build quality possible to cope with the full assault of the weather - from freezing snow storms to dusty, hot deserts," explains Hayfield. "Since outdoor cameras are often located in difficult to reach places, reliability is key as maintenance or replacement can be expensive, time-consuming and difficult." Maintenance also often requires specialist equipment, which is not likely to be easily – or cheaply – accessible.

Reliability in extreme conditions

Unlike indoor locations, where most variables can be held within narrow and predictable ranges, outdoor locations strain video surveillance to its limits. Outdoor security systems are required to endure exposure to wind, rain, variations in temperature (from extreme heat to extreme cold), humidity, dust, vibration, corrosive environments and acts of vandalism – and those systems that fail to live up to these requirements can pose a serious security risk. Changes in the natural environment must also be taken into consideration. For example, trees can grow very quickly and block the intended field of view – which is why a comprehensive site survey before installation is essential.

Weather

In many outdoor surveillance situations, cameras are likely to experience certain amounts of adverse weather. This can range from rain and snow, to thunderstorms and extreme cold or heat. Outdoor surveillance equipment must be designed with these factors in mind, and built with the ability to withstand the toughest conditions. It is important to prevent water ingress by using an IP (Ingress Protection) rated housing to ensure that the equipment does not suffer water damage. IP ratings are given to outdoor surveillance equipment to communicate their resistance to water and dust.

Tampering and vandalism
By their very nature, surveillance cameras can be unpopular with individuals who don't wish their actions to be monitored. It's therefore important for cameras to be able to fend off attempts to disable them – with vandal-resistant design, hardened casings and active tampering alarms. It also helps to use equipment that is unobtrusive in design, diverting attention away from it.

Image quality

But it's not enough merely to be able to operate in harsh conditions: cameras also need to deliver high resolution image quality coupled with high frame rates – very important when dealing with fast-moving subjects and varying lighting conditions. High image quality is especially important in applications such as parking lot and city/perimeter surveillance and at airports/seaports and train stations, in order to clearly identify people and vehicles.

Factors such as extremes of light and dark, shadows and fast-moving objects can also adversely affect the effectiveness of the security camera. Constantly changing light conditions are the norm for outdoor surveillance installations, from one minute to the next and from brightest daylight to darkest night. Security cameras need to be able to cope with all levels of lighting, utilising infrared technology at night and iris control in bright sunlight to ensure exceptional image quality at all times.

Ease of installation
Whilst image usability is one of the most important considerations when choosing an outdoor security camera, the needs of the security consultants and integrators must also be kept in mind. The need to be able to competitively install, commission and support the systems you're recommending and selling is an undeniably important issue. An outdoor surveillance solution needs to be easy to install, saving time and resources, whilst being resilient and producing excellent image quality.

Whether a site needs five cameras or five hundred, installation is critical and often costly. Outdoor network cameras are often placed in difficult areas, high up on walls, ceilings or poles, for example. In large-scale systems with hundreds of cameras, all time-savings during installation significantly reduce the system cost. The easier the installation and configuration, the bigger the benefits to both customer and installer.

[Additional info to consider]

High-performance camera solutions for all outdoor conditions, from Axis Communications

Axis Communications has recently launched a new range of unique outdoor products, designed to withstand the rigours of outdoor placement whilst delivering the excellent quality of our most successful indoor cameras. All products have been designed with the installers and end users in mind, making the implementation process quick, easy and painless.

New arrivals include the AXIS 215 PTZ-E and AXIS Q6032-E PTZ dome network cameras, and the AXIS P33 and AXIS P13 network camera series. Axis outdoor products withstand the toughest conditions, providing protection from rain, snow, sun, dust, extremes in temperature, vibrations and vandalism.

Both dome network cameras are dustproof and protected against dust and water, complete with IP66 classification and a wide operating temperature range – made possible by built-in heater and fan, and removable sunshield. The AXIS Q6032-E offers temperature control for intense Arctic temperatures, with quick and secure start-up after power loss at temperatures as low as -40°C, and pre-heating to avoid PTZ motor damage.

Axis's outdoor-ready cameras are vandal-protected, with hardened casings and active tampering alarms – and, importantly, they offer quick and easy installation. Outdoor camera features include bracket prepared for cabling along wall & pole; power, video and remote PTZ through same cable; bayonet connector on camera housing; pre-mounted wall bracket; multifunctional mounting plate for wall, ceiling or junction box; and quick and firm snap-in of camera unit. Cameras are easy to configure, with remote zoom, remote focus and pixel counter (AXIS P33 and AXIS P13 models).

Of course, image quality is never compromised in Axis's outdoor cameras. Incorporating a high-quality transparent dome cover to minimise any effects on image quality, the cameras adjust to changing lighting conditions using iris control and automatic day and night functionality for improved light sensitivity in low light conditions. The cameras also benefit from electronic image stabilisation to reduce motion blur - particularly important for PTZ cameras mounted in windy environments – and progressive scan for crisp images of moving objects.

About Axis
Axis is an IT company offering network video solutions for professional installations. The company is the global market leader in network video, driving the ongoing shift from analogue to digital video surveillance. Axis products and solutions focus on security surveillance and remote monitoring and are based on innovative, open technology platforms.

Axis is a Swedish-based company, operating worldwide with offices in more than 20 countries and cooperating with partners in more than 70 countries. Founded in 1984, Axis is listed on the NASDAQ OMX Stockholm Exchange under the ticker AXIS. For more information about Axis, please visit our website at www.axis.com

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