Excellent Software counts on Axis to optimize retail sales and security.

Axis network cameras drive real time people counting solution.

Organization:
Excellent Software

Location:
Auckland, New Zealand

Industry segment:
Retail

Application:
People counting integration with point of sale system

Mission

With most retail stores using a time-consuming and error-prone approach to customer or "people counting" solutions, New Zealand-based point of sale software developer Excellent Software saw an opportunity for more timely delivery of data on customer numbers for retailers to maximize sales opportunities. It set out to develop an affordable, real-time alternative to the manual data collection and updating approach often used by retailers; one which would give retailers rapid feedback on customer visits.

Solution

Excellent Software developed an IP-based people counting solution. AXIS 207 Network Cameras count the number of customers entering and leaving retail premises in real time, and the results are automatically uploaded to store reporting systems every 15 minutes.

Result

The Excellent Software people counter system allows a retailer to identify trends and maximize sales opportunities by counting the number of people entering and leaving a shop.

Retailers can use the data to optimize rostering and allocation of staff, identify trends in shopping patterns and gain rapid feedback on the effectiveness of marketing activities.

The powerful system, which has already been rolled out at a leading furniture chain store in New Zealand, gives retailers the flexibility to use the network cameras for store surveillance too.

AXIS COMMUNICATIONS

> "We searched all over the world for a solution. We wanted something with real-time counting and collecting of data every 15 minutes. It had to be networkable. We wanted something to do the counting, accumulate it, manage the data and bring it back. Axis network cameras do that."

Alex Heffer, Managing Director, Excellent Software.

Simple, powerful networked solution

When a furniture retailer that already used Excellent Software point of sale systems was looking at buying a standard, one-day counting solution, Excellent Software's Managing Director knew there had to be a better way to count customers.

"There are other people counting solutions, but lower cost ones are based on collecting data once a day. The staff have to read the door count information off the door counter and then re-key the numbers into the sales analysis system every day. Apart from taking time and being prone to error, this also can allow staff to change the numbers to make them look better," he explained.

"We were planning to develop our own people counting device using beams and counting devices when we found something that had everything we wanted in it. The Axis network cameras were capable of being used the way we wanted to for people counting, and then we discovered we could use them for security as well."

"We can offer a top end solution for smaller retailers that they would not otherwise have the opportunity to get. The simplicity of having a Linux-based device with the operating system in the camera makes it extremely powerful. You don't have a lot of things to go wrong along the way."

"It's much easier to install than an infra-red beam. If a customer moves stock in the way, a beam stops working, and you can't tailor it remotely to suit changing circumstances. Installation costs and support costs are lower with our Axis solution. Our clients can plug the camera in and point it at the door, then we can take over specifying the count bars and timing remotely."

Rapid feedback on advertising effectiveness and conversion rates

Viewing trends in the people count data assists with evaluating the effectiveness of advertising and promotions. "If you are a retailer spending a lot of money on advertising, you want to see as quickly as possible what your trends and conversion rates are. You can see trends increasing with this solution because you get a graduation throughout the day," he said.

Retailers can review their 'conversion ratios' – the people count compared with sales for that same 15-minute period on a single table listing day of the week and time of the day. They can assess the effectiveness of staff and supervisor schedules by identifying times of day and days of the week where conversion ratios are higher or lower than normal.

The data helps optimize part-time staff rostering and break times to maximize sales opportunities. Additional internal cameras can be used to measure foot traffic moving in and out of specific areas to help analyze staffing requirements for particular areas.

Optimized for specific store environments

Because in some environments customers tend to shop as couples or families, Excellent Software has optimized its software for specific store environments. For example, because people typically shop as couples at furniture stores, it has tailored the count area and delay so the camera more accurately counts each couple as a single sales opportunity, rather than two.

"You can tell the camera where to count – you can draw lines on the screen, depending on the layout of the particular door and store lighting," Mr Heffer added. Stores can also link the people counting cameras to a PC or DVR running Milestone security software to record all movements past the camera for security purposes. In conjunction with additional cameras, the Axis network cameras can replace a traditional store surveillance system.

"Because we are the software company we can tie it all together. That makes it easy for our retail customers, and Axis makes it easy for us because the cameras are very reliable."