Covering all bets.

Tampa Bay Downs uses Axis video encoders to exceed State-mandated surveillance standards in its Silks Poker Room.

Organization:
Tampa Bay Downs

Location:
Tampa, Florida, USA

Industry segment:
Casino/Gaming

Application:
State-mandated surveillance

Axis partners:
CDW, Milestone Systems

Mission

When the State of Florida legislated stricter surveillance standards for casinos and other gaming venues, Tampa Bay Downs needed to find a cost-effective way to increase the frame rate and image clarity of its archived video. Rather than scrap its entire analog camera system, the thoroughbred race track sought to replace its poker room DVR-based recording equipment with digital encoders that would enable the venue to satisfy the new mandate.

Solution

Tampa Bay Downs purchased an Axis video encoder rack and an array of hot-swappable encoder blades from Axis partner, Illinois-based CDW to digitize the video stream from 60 analog cameras in its Silks Poker Room. The race track also purchased a new Milestone XProtect® Corporate video management system which would allow security personnel intuitive access and multiple search options into the archived video stored on a series of HP servers.

Result

The extremely high image clarity and 30 frames per second transmission speed of the new Axis video encoder have enabled Tampa Bay Downs to exceed the State-mandated surveillance standards. And since the Axis encoders use advanced H.264 compression technology, the race track has been able to archive far more than the 14 days mandated by the State of Florida without expanding its storage array.

Keeping revenue flowing 24/7

The 30-table Silks Poker Room at Tampa Bay Downs operates 18 hours a day, seven days a week. Some 60 cameras provide multiple views of the patrons and dealers as they engage in favorites like Seven Card Stud and Texas Hold'em. Over 50 plasma televisions and roaming tellers also allow fans to watch and wager on simulcast horseracing and other pari-mutuel events as they sit at the poker tables. State regulations require that the operation be under constant surveillance. This was problematic under the race track's old DVR-based system.

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"The Axis video encoders give us a level of granularity and flexibility far beyond what our old DVR-based system could deliver, which enables us to exceed State mandates with our existing analog cameras."

John Vacha, Director of Information Technologies for Tampa Bay Downs.

"If a DVR failed, we would have to close the section of the poker room covered by the cameras attached to that system and lose the revenue," explains John Hernandez, Network Administrator for Tampa Bay Downs. "If an Axis encoder blade should ever go down, though, we can hot-swap the card in a matter of minutes with no disruption to gaming activity."

It took Tampa Bay Downs less than 24 hours to install an AXIS Q7900 Rack that could house up to 14 hot-swappable AXIS Q7406 Video Encoder Blades. The 4U 19-inch rack, one of the industry's highest-density rack solutions, can integrate up to 84 analog cameras into an IP-based video surveillance solution. Because of its redundant power supply, one can be replaced without disrupting rack operation. The Axis rack even supports hot-swappable fan cassettes that can be replaced without cutting off power to the rack. "We currently use 10 AXIS Q7406 Video Encoder Blades that support six analog cameras per blade," says John Vacha, Director of Information Technologies for Tampa Bay Downs. "And we have room to add up to four more blades before we have to add another rack."

For Vacha, the additional benefit of the Axis system is the ease with which Tampa Bay Downs can swap out cards should Axis come out with new features and capabilities. The Milestone XProtect® video management system also contributes to operational simplicity with its ease of use, reliability and flexibility that an open platform provides. Tampa Bay Downs wanted a video management platform that would allow them the freedom to expand without a costly 'forklift upgrade.' According to Vacha, "Milestone has delivered on everything promised – from how easy it was to set up and run to how flexible and scalable the system is for future expansion."

Boosting clarity while minimizing storage
Before the State of Florida decided to adopt stricter standards similar to those instituted at Las Vegas casinos, surveillance guidelines were very general. There had to be sufficient camera coverage of the entire poker room. But other than 30 frames per second, the regulations did not specify number of cameras or recording resolution.

Tampa Bay Downs was already proactively placing cameras in the poker room to give management multiple views of individual areas. "You don't usually put up a ladder and replace a camera in the middle of the day," shares John Vacha, Director of Information Technologies for Tampa Bay Downs. "So we need to have several cameras angled on activity in an area or the State will demand that we shut down the section for lack of surveillance."

Under the new regulations, however, Tampa Bay Downs would have to boost its recording resolution from 320x280 pixels to what the industry refers to as 4CIF – recording and live viewing at a resolution of 704x480 pixels. "Most DVRs don't reach that level of clarity," explains Vacha. "But in looking for a solution, we didn't want to buy all new cameras or have to rewire our entire surveillance infrastructure. With the Axis encoder technology, we could use our existing infrastructure and legacy analog cameras and even exceed the new State mandates."

AXIS Q7406 Video Encoder Blades deliver 30 frames per second in resolutions up to D1 (720x480 pixels in NTSC) giving Tampa Bay Downs extremely high image clarity. Because the encoders support H.264 compression technology, Tampa Bay Downs has reduced its surveillance bandwidth requirements while increasing the storage capacity of its existing drives. "We've been able to far exceed both the resolution requirements and the State-mandated 14 days of archiving without having to go out and buy a whole new storage array," states Vacha.

Migrating IP-Surveillance beyond the poker tables
"Tampa Bay Downs is always looking to improve security as well as the creature comforts of our customers," says Vacha. "Now that we've exceeding our expectations in our poker room, we're considering upgrading our analog surveillance in other areas of our operation such as our betting windows which are still using our old DVR-based systems." With the flexibility of the Axis encoders, even if Florida gaming regulations get tighter, Tampa Bay Downs is confident that its new IP technology will easily meet those stricter requirements.

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