



CUSTOMER STORY – RETAIL – GROCERY

Bagging a better bottom line.

Crest Foods upgrades grocery chain security with AXIS Camera Station, Axis cameras, and network door stations, to reduce shrink, prevent accidents, increase sales, and improve employee training and safety.

ORGANIZATION
CREST FOODS

LOCATION
EDMOND, OKLAHOMA, USA

CUSTOMER NEED
LOSS PREVENTION,
PROPERTY PROTECTION

Stack it high, sell it cheap

Crest Foods, a chain of family owned and operated grocery stores in Oklahoma, was founded in 1946 by Nick Harroz, Jr. But the success of that first Midwest City food market traces back to 1929 when Nicola Harroz, Senior opened the family's first grocery store with the guiding principle to "Stack It High, Sell It Cheap." Now run by the family's third generation, the chain has grown to nine stores statewide with a tenth currently under construction.

To keep costs down, the chain buys direct from manufacturers, doesn't spend a lot on advertising or expensive frills and gimmicks. What it does do is stock a good variety of products at rock-bottom prices and makes sure it treats its customers like family.

"Because we set a high bar when it comes to taking good care of our customers, we've come to expect that same level of customer service from our vendors – especially when it comes to our security solutions provider," says Eric Lollar, Safety Coordinator for Crest Foods.

Shopping for better security, better service

When Crest Foods made the switch from an analog to a digital security camera system, it seemed like a great step up for the chain.

"But over time," says Lollar, "it became apparent that the vendor didn't have our best interest at heart." For instance, if a camera station or DVR went down, it would take six weeks for the vendor to repair and send it back and reinstall it into the system. Frustrated, Lollar decided it was time to rethink the relationship.

Working with Convergent Technologies, a global systems integrator and Axis partner, Lollar began to systematically replace his aging cameras and video management system with more advanced and reliable technology from Axis. Today, the company has deployed nearly 1,300 Axis cameras and 47 Axis network video recorders throughout its grocery chain. The cameras are managed through the AXIS Camera Station video management software (VMS).

The mix of Axis camera models deployed throughout the grocery stores, parking lots and warehouse, reflects the diversity of the areas they monitor. There are 4K bullet cameras covering the parking lots, multisensor panoramic cameras overlooking the sidewalks, wide dynamic range dome cameras in the warehouse, mini dome cameras for the grocery aisles and self-checkout areas, and more.



"Whether it's someone trying to shoplift, a fender bender in the parking lot, or a hazardous spill in an aisle, the Axis cameras give me excellent forensic details to act on. But what also drove me to Axis is their outstanding customer service."

Eric Lollar, Safety Coordinator for Crest Foods.

"The video recording we get from these cameras is extremely sharp, even in lowlight situations, which is really helpful for forensic investigations," says Lollar. "And manipulating the camera views is far simpler than our old system. If my security staff wants to zoom in on a camera view, it's just a matter of clicking and dragging the mouse."

He also points out that searching for incident video is so much easier with AXIS Camera Station. "Our old VMS required a lot of complicated steps to playback the segment we wanted," asserts Lollar. "We're finding that the AXIS Camera Station is so much faster to use."

Customer support is another sharp contrast. "I can call or email Axis Technical Services with questions about their software and there's always someone knowledgeable to walk me through it," says Lollar. "I like that I can usually get an answer the same day – sometimes even in just a few minutes."



Preserving rock bottom pricing

To keep grocery prices low, Crest Foods uses the cameras to help avert problems that can drive up operating costs – things like shoplifting, slip-and-falls, customers using stolen checks and stolen credit cards, and loose shopping carts damaging cars in the parking lot.

"Shoplifting is pretty commonplace in grocery stores," admits Lollar. "With the forensic quality of the video we record with our Axis cameras, we're not only able to capture a good image of the thief's face, we can also see what they took off the shelf and put in their pockets or down their pants." So when security detains the person, there's no room for denial.

Not only does this help the store catch the thief quicker, but if they manage to flee, security can print out a picture of the person for law enforcement to use to find the offender. "If we're lucky, our Axis parking lot cameras might even capture the license plate and make and model of the car they were driving and pass along those images as well," shares Lollar.

In the case of stolen checks or credit cards, the timeline is a bit different since it can take a few weeks to determine that the check or card was fraudulently used. "In that case, we review our cash register transaction logs to determine when the purchase was made and use that information to narrow the search parameters for video of the perpetrator," explains Lollar.

Thanks to strategic placement of Axis cameras, security has stopped people from grazing produce displays like a free snack bar. Store managers have seen when frozen sidewalks needed ice melt treatment to prevent slip and falls. And they've spotted safety issues like liquid spills and other hazards for custodial staff to clean up.

"The safety and security of our patrons and employees depends on our ability to identify problem areas where accidents or incidents are happening, who's doing it, and why it's happening so we can take corrective action," shares Lollar.

Once backroom cameras recorded which forklift driver punctured a hole in a trailer, the store manager was able to put him through retraining to prevent future damage. When cameras caught a few employees sidestepping trash and spilled merchandise in the aisles, the store manager reviewed the footage with them as a reminder that good customer service includes helping to keep the store a safe and inviting place to shop.



Lollar has plans to use Axis horn speakers to address shoppers in specific grocery departments about product specials or to call employees to the office without having to make the announcement to the entire store. "Also, I like how you can just set up voice alerts for your parking lot," says Lollar. "So, if you see somebody's in an area that they're not supposed to be like behind the store which is an active area for trucks, I can use the speaker to call out to them urging them to use caution or vacate the area."

Securing the operations centers

Another point of focus has been the security of the grocery chain's corporate offices which house payroll operations and other business departments. "We wanted to prevent random people barging into those areas uninvited and berating or threatening our employees," states Lollar.

To create a safer work environment, Lollar secured the four doors to those offices with Axis door controllers. He also installed Axis intercoms with built-in card readers to monitor the area so you can see who is at the door. "Now you have to have an access code or use a fob to get in, which helps those employees avoid confrontations," says Lollar. "The added security makes them feel a lot safer."



Maintaining top-shelf safety and security

As Crest Foods continues to expand its operations across Oklahoma, Lollar looks for ways Axis technology can help the no-frills grocery chain maintain its rock-bottom pricing while delivering top-shelf safety and security to its customers and employees. "I like how Axis is always adding new features to their cameras that can help us make better decisions about how we respond to events," says Lollar. "Whether it's exceptional lowlight capabilities and wide dynamic range so we can see better in poor lighting conditions or Zipstream compression so we can increase video retention, I can count on Axis to deliver top-shelf solutions to help our business."

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Network intercoms
Secure and convenient communication.



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Axis enables a smarter and safer world by creating solutions for improving security and business performance. As a network technology company and industry leader, Axis offers solutions in video surveillance, access control, intercom, and audio systems. They are enhanced by intelligent analytics applications and supported by high-quality training.

Axis has around 4,000 dedicated employees in over 50 countries and collaborates with technology and system integration partners worldwide to deliver customer solutions. Axis was founded in 1984, and the headquarters are in Lund, Sweden.