

Artful surveillance.

The Art Institute blends Axis network cameras into gallery décor.



Organization:
The Art Institute of
Chicago

Location:
Chicago, Illinois, USA

Industry segment:
Government

Application:
Monitoring artwork and
visitors

Axis partner:
Honeywell Building
Solutions

Mission

The Art Institute of Chicago, one of the premier fine arts museums in the United States, is undergoing a major expansion to create a new wing to house its Modern Art collection. As part of the new construction process, the Department of Protection Services used the opportunity to re-evaluate its current analog surveillance system. Since the museum only closes its doors three days a year, a flexible, state-of-the-art IP-based system was the solution for minimal impact on museum operations.

Solution

The museum selected several models of Axis network cameras as the basis for its new surveillance standard along with Honeywell Digital Video Manager software, a digital closed-circuit television surveillance system. Working with security provider Honeywell, the museum staff placed network cameras through the museum complex to deter criminal activity and secure the safety of its visitors and its extensive art collection.

Result

With the new Axis network cameras and Honeywell video management system, the Illinois museum is able to expand coverage beyond what its older analog system could provide. Museum staff can monitor any location from multiple review points on the network and easily share incidents captured on video. "This solution provides a great tool for the security staff to observe museum activity," said Michelle Lehrman Jenness, an associate vice president in the Art Institute of Chicago's Department of Protection Services.

"Our new Axis network cameras and Honeywell video management system help us ensure the safety of visitors as they enjoy our exhibits as well as heighten the security around our irreplaceable collection of art."

Michelle Lehrman Jenness, Associate Vice President in the Art Institute of Chicago's Department of Protection Services.

Protecting 5,000 years of human expression

The Art Institute of Chicago, which houses more than 260,000 works of art, is especially well known for its extensive collection of paintings by some of the greatest masters of Impressionist and American art. With over 1.4 million visitors a year, the Art Institute only closes three days a year. So any behind-the-scenes activity like installing new surveillance equipment has to be accomplished as quickly as possible. "We can't be in there with ladders above an artwork installing a surveillance camera when we have patrons viewing art in the galleries," explained Lehrman Jenness. So when the museum embarked on an upgrade to its existing surveillance system, the quick and easy installation features of the Axis network cameras offered a welcome alternative to the long and involved process of stringing coax cables to analog cameras.

Putting new technology in an older building

Because the original structure dates back to 1893, the Protection Services Department has had to contend with a building that was not designed to accommodate modern surveillance technology. "When you're dealing with older buildings, access isn't always there for coax cabling," shared Lehrman Jenness. "With our older analog system, we used to run thousands of miles of coax cabling through the complex. The nice thing about network cameras is that we now just have to run Cat-6 cable to the nearest IT closet and we're good to go."

Preserving art and gallery aesthetics

Aesthetics, flexible programming and ease of redeployment were the criteria that led the Art Institute to Axis network video technology. "One thing we're very careful within an art museum is aesthetics," claimed Lehrman Jenness. "The Axis network cameras not only meet our needs in terms of surveillance coverage, but because of their small size, they can fit into areas our analog cameras never could." In some instances, staff have even mounted cameras on the track lighting to avoid detracting from the aesthetics of the artwork on display.

Lehrman Jenness also noted that the IP-based system gives the museum more flexibility than its old DVR-based

solution. "With the Honeywell Digital Video Manager, we can do things like pre-program individual cameras to run during specific hours and even set each camera's frames per second rate for recording and transmitting video to the monitoring station." Being able to quickly and easily move network cameras around a gallery to accommodate the different requirements for rotating exhibits was also important to the museum.

Shining a spotlight on low-light conditions

Maintaining critical surveillance after visiting hours presented another challenge for the museum. "To preserve certain types of artwork – particularly works on paper – they need to be displayed in as low light as possible," explained Lehrman Jenness. "So we turn off the lights during non-public hours. But we still want camera coverage."

To address this need, the museum chose several models of Axis network cameras specifically designed for lower-light operation both indoors and outside the museum buildings. Depending on the coverage needed, the Art Institute deployed an array of light-sensitive day & night cameras such as AXIS 225FD Fixed Dome Network Cameras and AXIS 233D Network Dome Cameras, as well as AXIS 209MFD Network Cameras to alert staff who are monitoring the museum of any activity that might require closer investigation. The Art Institute has also installed a number of AXIS 223M Network Cameras equipped with megapixel image sensors and day & night operating features. "The megapixel cameras give us a higher-resolution clarity in the video recording," reported Lehrman Jenness, "which helps us identify a person and decide whether he or she is authorized to be at that location."

Securing the future of art

As the Art Institute continues to share its growing collection with millions of art lovers every year, Lehrman Jenness feels the Axis network camera will play an important role in the museum's operations. "With the new network surveillance system," declares Lehrman Jenness, "we can feel confident in offering the public a chance to enjoy a wonderful array of artwork while ensuring the security of our collection."



Honeywell