



Spokane Valley's City Hall Balances Security with Public Access

Overview

How do you keep a building open and accessible to the public while ensuring that the employees who work there feel safe and secure? Today's hyper-vigilance on all things security makes this a common, but difficult, balancing act faced by those tasked to define and implement such solutions.

Washington State's new Spokane Valley City Hall was designed with just that challenge in mind. The building's tightly integrated video surveillance, access control and intrusion systems, specified by Coffman Engineers and configured and installed by EVCO Sound & Electronics, make masterful use of technology to simplify security operations while delivering on security needs. EVCO's President, Kevin Bauer, says, "We needed a solution that didn't just secure the building for employees; we also had to allow public access with a complex schedule of hours of operation, including spur of the moment changes."

Spokane Valley's Information Technology Specialist, Greg Bingaman ("Bing" to those who know him), oversaw the project and played a key role in defining how the system needed to perform. "In today's day and age, with concerns about active shooters and other scenarios, we wanted to make sure we had a good, safe environment. The ability to control access in and out of the building was our main focus, while keeping it easy for our employees." From an administrative standpoint, the top "must-haves" were a single, unified video management and access control platform, as well as Active Directory integration. "We run a very lean IT staff here, so anything that makes things easier for us to operate is always better. Instead of having two disparate systems that don't talk to each other, it makes more sense to have a single pane of glass," says Bing. "We also wanted to make it easy for our HR department to assign employee badges with the right user group credentials without reinventing the wheel, and an Active Directory integration does that."

To meet Bing's requirements, Ben Helms, the specifying engineer on the project, recommended an integrated Valerus video management and VAX access control system, both manufactured by Vicon. "It's a completely browser-based system," explains Ben, "and that adds a lot of advantages over a hard system. Plus, with the built-in, free integration between Valerus and VAX, it made sense to go in that direction."

Organization

City Hall, City of Spokane Valley, WA



Challenges

- Design a comprehensive video management and access control system that delivers added value through a single operational interface and integrated functionality
- Balance needs for public access to the community with the security and safety of employees
- Create automated processes that accommodate special events and unpredictable building hours of operation
- Provide the ability to monitor and administer systems remotely

Solution

Vicon's integrated Valerus/VAX video management and access control solution provides the City Hall's IT and Security staff with the ability to control access to the building while keeping the system easy and unobtrusive for employees to use. Customization of the software facilitates features like building lockdown, lobby access for special events, and the ability for employees to use their access cards to temporarily lock office suites as needed.

Results

Vicon's security solution allows the City's Hall's lean IT staff to operate more efficiently and effectively. City employees feel safe coming to work within the building while public spaces remain open and welcoming to the community.

"We were able to deliver exactly what our customer wanted; an access control and video management solution in one single package. It's all there, right at their fingertips."

~ Kevin Bauer, President, EVCO Sound & Electronics

Two Systems; One Interface

Jason Weidman, IT Manager at EVCO, led the installation team. He says that the Valerus system manages approximately 32 cameras, throughout the interior and exterior of the property, that communicate across a dedicated switch and V-LAN. All are hard-wired. The access control system is on a separate subnet, with its own switch and V-LAN. Each system requires a single Application Server to manage its respective software. Both the VMS and access control interfaces are web based and require no additional software installation in order to provide user access to the IT team responsible for managing them.

Bing says that "We really like the fact that it's a web-based interface that allows us to administer things remotely. For example, during construction, we had some contractors that needed to get into the building on a Saturday, and the access card we had given them wasn't configured properly. We were able to log into the system from home, make changes to their card, and they were able to get right in. In the old days, someone would have had to actually go there."

With the integrated interface, Bing says that mapping cameras to doors was easy enough for his own in-house team to handle. "With the correlation, we have that 'single pane of glass' that helps with investigations. When we look to see when a badge was used to come through a door, we can also immediately see if the person who used the badge is actually associated with it."

Bing is particularly fond of the view from one camera in the system, a Vicon 12 MP fisheye camera mounted vertically in the three-story lobby. "I can see a sweeping view of the whole facility. My colleagues were surprised by its capabilities. We can fly down into it and zoom around. It's my favorite camera in the whole installation."

Automating Access

Bing worked with EVCO to set up automated functionality for the VAX system. The lobby of the three-story building is open to the public daily, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, along with open access to the city council chambers, elevators and restrooms located on the first floor.



Most offices are enclosed within suites that require an access card to enter, making it necessary for visitors to be buzzed or escorted in. The elevators, while open to the public, limit basement access only to card holders. The elevators also require a card to access upper floors after business hours.

Bing says that much thought was put into developing an emergency response plan, including the ability to initiate a lock down from various locations in the building. In a lock down, all doors and almost all badges are immediately disabled, making it impossible for an intruder to take an employee's badge and proceed further into the building. "Even if a dangerous person got behind one set of doors, by locking the remaining doors, we minimize the threat vector. We had to make a compromise between security and availability, keeping the building accessible for the public." In addition, all office suites have two separate exits, giving people a secondary path to escape if one is blocked. This is important not only for security but for fire and life-safety events. Stairwells may be entered from any floor but provide the ability to exit only on the ground floor.

While not yet enabled, Bing says that it is the city's intention to provide the local police with a log-in to the building's surveillance cameras that they can access in cases of such an emergency. Providing them with full situational awareness – including live views of what is happening inside the building – can facilitate a more effective response and potentially save lives. "That's another way that the web-based interface is valuable," he says.

The VAX system has been configured so that Legal and HR staff can triple swipe their card at either door of their suite and immediately lock both doors, restricting access to all employees except members of their own department. Upon returning from lunch, another triple swipe will return the system to its default settings.

The building's burglar alarm, a Bosch system, is integrated with the access control platform. The last employee leaving the building after hours has the ability to lock-up and arm the system using his or her access card. Similarly, the first employee arriving in the morning automatically deactivates the system. The same goes for employees authorized to access the building on weekends or holidays.



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~ *Greg Bingaman, Information Technology Specialist, City of Spokane Valley*

Keeping It Simple

While EVCO tried to program the system with as much automated functionality as possible, there was one challenge that Jason and Bing ultimately decided to handle with a different approach. "Tuesday nights we have council meetings, and sometimes on Thursday nights we have planning commission meetings," says Bing. "We tried to figure out how to automate the door schedules for that but ran into a number of difficulties. First of all, we never know how long a meeting will last. Also, what happens when a meeting gets cancelled?" There were too many possible situations where automation might cause the people in charge to forget about their responsibilities for overriding the settings and locking up.

The solution was to provide employees working the council meetings with the ability to manually unlock and lock the lobby doors using a button tied into the Crestron AV system, which provides a relay input to the VAX server. Touch screen panels located at the front reception desk and in the council chambers let those responsible for the meetings unlock the doors before they start, and lock back up when they conclude. "Automation sometimes works great, but in this case, tying into the Crestron system made more sense," says Bing.

An Integrator's Perspective

While Bing's priority was an integrated system that optimized his team's efficiency, EVCO was equally concerned with ease of installation, configuration and set up, all factors that could affect their ability to deliver on time and within budget. They were able to minimize on-site installation time by handling much of the system configuration beforehand. Jason says, "We set up



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~ Kevin Bauer, President, EVCO Sound & Electronics

a router and a couple of switches in our office that mimicked what was prepared at the new building. Bing assigned us a couple of static IP blocks for both the Valerus and VAX systems, and we used that information to set up and assign devices in our temporary network." Much of that process was automated by the software. Jason adds, "It was easy to get up and running. I've worked with a lot of systems over the years, and this is one of the simpler in terms of how intuitive it is."

Installation was also simplified due to the design of VAX's hardware. EVCO's Kevin Bauer says, "I think what worked out very well was that in the majority of cases within the building, the access control module is actually mounted right over the door, so that really reduced our installation time and wiring time. It also makes it easier to service." Jason adds, "I'm an IT guy and I really liked the PoE Ethernet devices. We didn't need lock power supplies and that made things a lot simpler."

The Spokane Valley City Hall opened its doors to the public at a Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting Ceremony in October, 2017.



Open for Business

Bing was at the celebration, helping to welcome members of the community into a facility that will serve as their new civic center, and confident in the knowledge that they will continue to feel welcome on a daily basis, thanks to the building's security technology.

"EVCO was a great integrator on this project. They really brought a lot of knowledge and expertise and helped guide us in the decision making process," says Bing. Kevin is equally pleased with the outcome. "We had done A/V projects for Spokane Valley in the past, but this was our first security project with them and we were able to deliver exactly what they wanted, an access control and video management solution in one single package. It's all there, right at their fingertips."



135 Fell Court, Hauppauge, New York 11788 USA | 1 631.952.2288 | www.vicon-security.com

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