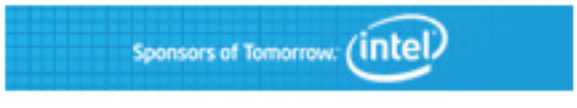


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Apped to Change Behavior

MobileCamViewer provides surveillance via smart-phone

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By D. Gail Fleenor

Keeping a remote eye on customers and employees is now commonplace in the security rooms of many retailers. Live, streaming video is accessed via desktop or laptop computers.

But how can merchants follow the action in their stores when a computer is not handy? MobileCamViewer software from mobiDEOS allows them to monitor live video on mobile devices like iPhones or BlackBerrys from home, on the road — or even from another part of the store.

Compatible with more than 650 mobile devices, the MobileCamViewer application also integrates with the most popular cameras, network video recorders (NVRs), DVRs and video servers on the market. The software can help retailers monitor any number of locations, from a single store to hundreds of outlets.

Victor Byaly has owned and operated a Mobil gas station and convenience store in Houston for seven years. To remotely observe store operations, Byaly used a Dedicated Micros multi-camera DVR and monitored the surveillance over the Internet. "I had to be close to a computer to monitor the store, which wasn't always convenient," he says.

Last summer, Byaly added MobileCamViewer software to his BlackBerry Pearl Flip 8220. "Now I have the ability to view the store from my phone," he says. "This information is available to me all the time even when I'm traveling, whether I'm near a computer or not."

Setting up the software was fairly easy; mobiDEOS "painlessly walked me through a connection issue I had," he says.

Byaly describes several recent situations he was able to rectify using MobileCamViewer. In the first instance, "I had repeatedly called the store but no one answered, so I used my BlackBerry to access store surveillance and discovered the store was closed when it was supposed to be open." When Byaly "checked in" on his store on another occasion, he noted a long line of customers and quickly called the store with customer service instructions.

Byaly's store was already equipped with multiple surveillance cameras of various brands and models; all were compatible with the MobileCamViewer application. He still uses his DVR to tape incidents and for playback that is larger and clearer than is possible on a mobile device.

Byaly thinks having anytime/anywhere access to surveillance may deter some employees who might be considering theft. "The MobileCamViewer does not make theft impossible," he says. "If an employee wants to steal, he will find a way. The software does, however, make it as difficult as possible for employees to steal. They know about the increased surveillance and have to decide whether they really still want to steal."

Peace of mind
Sri Palasamudram, CEO of Sunnyvale, Calif.-based mobiDEOS, has a passion for developing applications for mobile devices. Introduced six years ago, MobileCamViewer is one of those apps. A key element of the software's appeal is the continuous integration of new cell phones, cameras and DVRs. These efforts make MobileCamViewer easier to use and cost-effective for retailers, who do not have to invest in new hardware for the application.

"Customers can use this software seamlessly without abandoning their existing investment in hardware because we have ensured they will work together," Palasamudram says.

With major cell phone and PDA manufacturers like Apple, Motorola, Nokia, BlackBerry, Dell, HP, LG and Samsung on board, retailers can be assured of compatibility. The software is a carrier-class product, meaning it has been tested and passed by leading cell phone carriers like AT&T, Verizon and Sprint/Nextel, and it has been integrated with cameras, DVRs and NVRs from AXIS, Dedicated Micros, Milestone, Sony and Panasonic, among others.

MobileCamViewer offers a variety of special functions. Retail customers can use the software to control certain functions of their in-store cameras, including panning and zooming. Stores can also set the software to allow for playback when an alarm goes off in the store. "The user will receive an alert [and] be able to see what happened or what is still happening," Palasamudram says. "This allows clients to make quick decisions."

For extra security and control, the application can also be deployed via the MobileCamViewer Enterprise Server that is installed on the client's hardware. All video content is then controlled with no open ports or public IP address; no firewall policies need to be changed, and content is only pushed through SSL encryption.

Large corporations with hundreds of stores can face different technology issues than single storeowners or small chains. In large organizations, MobileCamViewer can be configured to grant access to specific cameras only to certain management employees. "This is especially important when an employee who has access loses the phone or it is stolen," Palasamudram says. In this situation, there is no need to stop all access to surveillance and jeopardize corporate security, he continues. "A particular phone can be blocked and denied access to surveillance immediately."

Real-time results
mobiDEOS strives "to make it simple for users to get to the video they need within 15 to 20 seconds," Palasamudram says. Other time-savers include an initial software download that takes three minutes. Contact with cameras and DVRs is also easy; there is no need to enter a URL password each time a retailer wants to access a camera.

Manpower to track store operations is limited, and it is difficult to find the time to sit in front of a computer or make personal visits to stores for observation. Now, if an incident occurs, "it can be seen immediately on a cell phone," Palasamudram says. "For example, if an employee clocks in for an absent employee, this can be seen right away."

Productivity may also receive a boost through the use of MobileCamViewer. Employees can be observed at any time, and awareness of this fact can discourage loafing on the job. And some retailers choose to reward employees observed doing something positive.

Big-box or department stores sometimes use the application to provide "another eye on the action" in outlying areas of the store. "They can still be present with customers in other aisles of the store while observing 'suspect' sections," Palasamudram says.

Store owners and managers don't have the time "to go through all the surveillance tapes, and employees are aware of this," he says. "But if store conditions can be seen at anytime via cell phone and employees know this, it can encourage them to do the right thing."

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