

From Very Old to Very New

When it came time to upgrade from their now obsolete VCRs, Blue Cross/Blue Shield Chose a Brand-new System from Vicon

When Blue Cross/ Blue Shield of Illinois, Texas and New Mexico decided to take a step up from their old VCRs, they were looking for something really special.

“The equipment we had was completely outdated and we needed an upgrade,” says James Terry, supervisor, security, Illinois division. “Our equipment was useless for what we needed it for. We wanted a Cadillac, not a Station Wagon. We’d already had the Station Wagon.”

The Requirements

Blue Cross/Blue Shield had some specific features they were looking for in a digital video recorder. “We require 30-45 days of storage space,” Terry says. “Not only that, but we wanted a quality piece of equipment.”

Other items on their wish list included digital recording, ease-of-use, connectivity, maintenance ease, frames-per-second, resolution and a clear picture once it is played back.

Blue Cross worked through Sako and Associates, a security consulting firm that has been their consultant since the early 1990’s. “They wanted to move into the 21st century,” says Matt Tevenan, project manager, Sako and Associates. “The big things they wanted were security managers wanted a way to easily investigate incidents at remote facilities from the headquarters. Plus they were sick of fumbling around with the old VCR tape technology.”

Terry also augmented his research by attending a conference to see what equipment was available. It was there that he was introduced to Vicon’s line of products.

“We initially picked four different vendors,” Terry says. “Vicon won. It wasn’t the cheapest, but it felt like one of the best.” The way it was presented and the knowledge behind the presentation, plus the features it had were the deciding factors. “Another major reason was when you have an incident, you can play back and not miss anything. That’s phenomenal.”

Initially, the product Blue Cross/Blue Shield looked at was the Kollector. But when the Kollector Elite became available, they readily went with that. The Kollector Elite Digital Recorder is designed as a product that can record 16 videos on the internal hard drive but also send that video over the network to other Kollector Elite recorders on the same network

“The reason why we went with that is we wanted the latest and greatest. When [Vicon] upgraded, we wanted the best,” Terry says.

The IT Factor

One of the challenges Blue Cross/Blue Shield faced once they decided on a product was to make it work on their corporate wide area network and to get buy-in from the information technology department.

As a national insurance carrier, “a large part of their business is claims processing over a network,” Tevenan says. “IT wanted to know what impact this would have on their network.”

To that end, several meetings were set up to explain the new system to the IT department.

“I remember one meeting where we filled a conference room with IT people,” says Bill Wilke, sales engineer, Vicon. “At Blue Cross, their only product is their information base. The network is the lifeblood of their whole company. Their IT department is extremely cautious and aware of everything they will allow on that network.”

IT asked security to come up with a usage statement, explaining how they would use the WAN and when. “They also wanted to do their own testing to see what this product would consume on their network,” Wilke explains. Ultimately, IT gave them the go-ahead, but with some caveats.

“They don’t give them Carte Blanche,” he adds. “IT monitors the bandwidth consumed by the different departments. [Security] is not going to continuously connect to locations and just monitor video. They are going to connect when they are aware of an incident. On site, they are monitoring many locations. Corporate security can then retrieve that information and make assessments of situations.”

A Big Step Up

Installation of the Kollector Elites began last April and is ongoing. They currently have around 45 units installed in the three states – close to 25 remote offices.

They use them to monitor egress points for both employees and visitors, and as an investigation tool for any kind of occurrence.

“Local security people are aware of any situations going on at their site,” Wilke explains. “Say there was a slip and fall in the front lobby. They can tell corporate that there was an incident and they think that they should take a look because there might be a liability issue. Or if something is happening real time, they can get word to corporate and they can look at the live video.”

Besides retrieving recorded or live information over the network, remote configuration of DVRs is another plus, Wilke says. “James Terry can sit in Chicago and configure the

different units in the field from his desk. He can change frame rates and image qualities as opposed to having someone on site do it.”

This also saves on travel, Tevenan adds. “The biggest benefit I see is their distributed approach to working. “It’s less headache to go look at something or respond. A lot of it is the ease of not having to travel to that location.”

Of course, the other obvious benefit is simply the giant technological leap in going from using tapes and VCRs to DVRs.

“The benefit of the product to me is that it’s far more advanced than a VCR or multiplexer,” Terry says. “The old technology that came out years ago was poor playback. When we have had incidents and wanted to play them back on these pieces of equipment, they have been phenomenal. It’s close to the same quality as when you sit down to watch a movie at home. There is very little to no stepping. It’s very fluid.”