

## **Growing College Campus Puts New Digital Video System to the Test**

When Ramapo College of New Jersey began to transition from a primarily commuter college to a residential college two years ago, it quickly became clear that their current video system wasn't going to cut it.

“We've had an ongoing construction program,” says Robert O'Brien, security director of the college. “Just about every year a new residence hall is coming on line. We'd just about reached the maximum with our video system. We needed to convert to digital to move forward.”

In addition, the college had other concerns with their aging video playback equipment. “The video recorders were older models,” O'Brien says. “The video tapes had to be constantly recirculated. And we had no way to check to see if the signal was being recorded until we actually went for playback. Our ability to give something to the police department that they could use was very limited.”

### **Need for Evidence**

Indeed, the college was hindered by their video tape-based system.

“It was very specialized. Video had to be played back on our system. We were hampered in our ability to work with the police department or anyone else in terms of investigations. They would have to come here to watch it and they couldn't leave with anything that was tangible.”

On-site investigations were difficult as well. “We've had investigations where officers were having to view over 40 hours of video tape,” O'Brien recounts. “That required them to be doing just that for that one investigation. It tied up all the equipment and the officer during that time. And we couldn't claim an investigation was complete until they'd watched the entire thing.”

In one instance, expensive monitors were stolen from the computer lab. “Officers had to watch the entire tape to make sure [the suspects] were the only ones who removed equipment,” O'Brien says. “It was successful, but there was a great deal of time dedicated to this.”

### **A Better Investigative Tool**

So when the college decided that a new video system was needed, one of the criteria was a system that would be a more effective investigative tool.

The choice? A digital video system from Vicon, using their Kollector Elite DVRs.

“Digital gives us a lot more flexibility,” O’Brien says. “Now any investigation we get involved in, our officer is directed to investigate. He can go back to his work station, which controls all the digital recorders. He can go to a given period of time and check.

“He can just watch the time in which there is activity. It allows you to skip over viewing non-activity times in that area. Also, when it comes to playback, it also saves a great deal of time. We can take a snapshot picture off of the digital playback and develop it into a picture that can be handed to the police.”

The college felt that the new technology also warranted a new protocol as well. “This use is new for us,” O’Brien says. “We had to evolve an investigative protocol in order to fully utilize it.”

They now develop a single shot into a picture and print it out. “Originally we didn’t plan for a photo software system or printer,” O’Brien says. “Now we have a software package that allows the picture to be developed on a photo quality printer. We can freeze frame the shot and make a copy. That shot becomes the investigative tool. It’s handy for the police if you have a suspect. And we can record it to a CD to become evidence should it go to court.”

Recently, the college had a test of the new system.

“We had a complaint that out of one of classrooms, items that individual left -- some books and a coat -- were missing. He reported it to security. Using the Kollector Elites, our officer was able to discern an individual who appeared to have gone into the room and left with items that he hadn’t gone in with. Unfortunately, he had a hat on and was difficult to identify. We developed snapshot picture and the police began their investigation. A week later, our officer was able to observe same individual without a hat and identified the individual. As a result, police questioned him and he confessed.”

### **Meeting Expectations**

The new system more than meets the College’s expectations, O’Brien says.

“It provides absolute reliability,” he says. “With the old system we didn’t know if it was recording or functioning properly. This system allows you to monitor constantly.

“In addition, digital gives us a lot more flexibility. The playback is a lot easier for officers to do.”

Perhaps even more important is that the system meets the expectations of the college’s inhabitants, O’Brien says. “Once you have a video system there is an expectation that you will be able to produce an investigation upon request. Students, their parents, the police, staff on campus all assume that you can provide lead information off of video. There have been occasions [with the old system] when there were problems with the signal and it was not recorded. It’s much better with digital. The reliability is vastly increased.”

The speed of the system is also a big benefit, O'Brien says. "We can handle more investigations and process them a lot quicker. Time is very important in an investigation. The quicker you can discover who the likely suspects are, the better your investigation is."

The new system not only produces better and quicker investigations, it also allows the college address more issues.

"When we had an investigation that took 40 hours, something of lesser importance often had to be put aside," O'Brien says. "Now we can investigate 'quality of life' items as well. In some cases it's not something that everybody would expect you would investigate, but we can resolve issues with people who are living together, especially in residence halls. Colleges that don't have a system like this are not able to investigate anywhere near as much as we can."

Ultimately, better investigative tools lead to happy results for all. "Students have an expectation that you will be able to investigate [any issues]. When we are successful, they are very happy. And their parents are very happy. That really makes the parent feel that there is a degree of safety that Ramapo has for their children as opposed to a place that has nothing. It may very well be a factor in whether they choose to come here or not."