Axis for a safety touch at the Grey Cup Festival.

Four days, 241,000 people, and no security incidents: how IP security helped festival organizers keep the peace.

Organization:
Grey Cup Festival

Location:
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

Industry segment:
Stadiums/Venues

Application:
Safety and security, crowd control

Axis partner:
Reliable Security and Controls

Mission

The Grey Cup is the Canadian Football League's biggest game, a one-day winner-take-all match between the East and West Divisional champions. Before the game, the host city stages Canada's biggest party: the Grey Cup Festival. In November 2013, the four-day festival took over Regina, Saskatchewan, and 241,000 people streamed through the numerous venues. The outdoor party included a street festival, parade, concerts, team-sponsored celebrations and a fan football field, plus three massive tents. All large public events pose security hurdles, but with a huge space, bitter cold temperatures and 241,000 fired-up football fans, the Grey Cup Festival was an especially daunting challenge to secure.

Solution

To monitor this large setting, organizers worked with systems integrator Reliable Security and Controls of Regina to install 32 Axis network cameras, including HDTV-quality pan/tilt/zoom domes for high image usability and thermal units to monitor perimeters 24/7.

Most of the cameras were connected via Ethernet to a mobile security trailer, while a few units located in a busy cobblestoned area were linked wirelessly.

Result

From the earliest planning meetings, organizers decided to rely on a two-part security plan, part one was comprehensive video coverage, and part two was publicizing the presence of the cameras. That decision resulted in a peaceful and family-friendly Grey Cup festival. The four-day event was held without one security incident. Festival staff attribute the event's safety in large part to the deterrent value of the Axis IP cameras.

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> "We are a big believer in the quality of Axis cameras and in the ease of installing them. Axis is our flagship product. We didn't consider using any other vendor for this project."

Al Mallard, Security Manager, Reliable Security and Controls.

Extra excitement

The Grey Cup Festival is always a big party. The pre-game event is a boisterous celebration with a parade, concerts, team parties and fan football games. In 2013, the party was even bigger because the city hosting the game, Regina, Saskatchewan, was the hometown of the East Division champs, the Saskatchewan Roughriders. "Emotions ran very high, because the hometown team was playing in the cup," said Neil Donnelly, executive director of the 101st Grey Cup Festival. "But the event went very well, and we had no security incidents."

That was an accomplishment to be proud of. The four-day event hosted more than 241,000 people in numerous locations throughout a public park including three massive tents with many fans enjoying tail-gaiting activities. In addition, the wind chill reached minus 30°C.

Tight timelines

Organizers worked with local firm Reliable Security and Controls to install 32 Axis IP cameras. Most cameras were linked back to the security trailer via Ethernet, but some installed in a busy, cobblestoned area were connected wirelessly. Cameras such as the AXIS Q6035 PTZ (pan/tilt/zoom) Network Cameras and AXIS P33 series Fixed Dome Cameras covered the tent interiors, and AXIS Q1921-E Thermal Network Cameras and AXIS Q6034-E PTZ Network Cameras monitored the outdoor spaces. They also added extra coverage to sensitive areas such as entrances and exits, ATMs and bars stations.

The ease of setup of the cameras and the AXIS Camera Station was important to Mallard. "Because of the weather, setting up the tents happened later than we hoped, so we only had a few days to get the security system in place, rather than two weeks." AXIS Camera Station is an optimized VMS for Axis network cameras and designed to get small to mid-sized installations up and running smoothly. The cameras were assembled and tested in a shop, right down to the IP addressing, and then installed in their locations.

All day, all night

Cameras such as the AXIS P3364-E employ features including Lightfinder technologies and Wide Dynamic Range (WDR) to combat challenging lighting conditions. "We had a wide range of lighting," Mallard said. "The three tents were essentially small buildings, so we had bright outdoor and dimmer indoor light. It gets dark early here this time of year, so the WDR cameras and Lightfinder were really important to us."

This meant the security personnel and Regina Police Service officers monitoring the cameras always had clear images. At night, thermal cameras served as perimeter security support in areas with low light coverage. "The thermal cameras made it easy to cover a large area of the park," Mallard said. "We were able to detect people even though it was dimly lit."
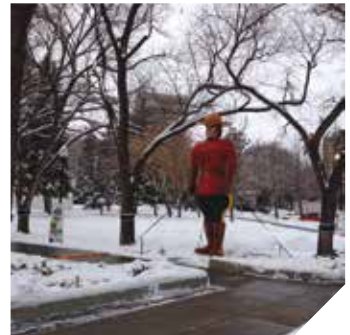
The cameras also helped manage the event. Because of the extreme cold, for example, the length of the outdoor lines was monitored to ensure no one was outside for too long.

"These national events carry a higher level of risk," Donnelly said. "So we had multiple layers of checks, and we told everyone about the cameras. The security measures and our work communicating about them resulted in a safe environment."

Dollar savings

The cameras also allowed organizers to use security guards more effectively. "The overnight security was a particular concern outdoors, because you can't lock down those large areas, and you've got a lot of people moving around," Donnelly said.

"If you didn't have security cameras in place, you would need large numbers of security personnel to patrol the area. That means the cameras certainly saved us money."

"I wasn't sure how people attending the Grey Cup Festival would view the cameras, but they were all aware the cameras were there. We even saw media interviews during the festival in which people said the cameras made them feel safer," said Neil Donnelly, Executive Director, 101st Grey Cup Festival.

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