State-Of-The-Art Centralized Security Platform Redefines Campus Safety

NYC-based School of Visual Arts partners with an integrator and manufacturer to bolster the protection of students, faculty, staff and campus physical assets. By Monique Merhige

Safety has always been a priority for New York City's School of Visual Arts (SVA). In addition to ensuring the personal safety of all members of its community, it is critical for the college to secure computer equipment, specialized technology and other high value academic and administrative assets. Further, given its diffuse campus, large commuter-student population and commitment to civic responsibility, SVA's security interests extend beyond its own buildings. Occasionally, the New York Police Department (NYPD) has asked SVA to provide video footage for ongoing investigations that are unrelated to campus activities. These security needs require reliable access to information on college community members and visitors, as well as robust surveillance capabilities.

SVA already had standalone video surveillance and door access systems on campus, but administrators were interested in upgrading their overall security system and simplifying the management of security operations college-wide.

"We needed a centralized system," says Cosmin Tomescu, SVA's chief information officer. "We were looking for a solution that would easily integrate with the majority of the equipment already in place. The objectives were to minimize the impact on our security office and reduce the cost of re-cabling every location."

SVA SELECTS AN INTEGRATOR FOR THE JOB

In May 2014, the SVA administrators contacted Idesco Corp. to initiate the upgrade. A provider of security solutions and SVA's security partner since 2011, Idesco has worked with other high-profile New York City campuses, including New York University and Pace University, and has installed and integrated numerous security systems, such as access control, video surveillance, ID badging, biometrics, turnstiles and visitor management.

It's crucial for schools to have a trusted security advisor on board that can work closely with their IT and security departments to upgrade their current security system effectively. By working with a security integrator they trusted, SVA administrators could rest easy knowing that the right security professionals were on their team and could advise them properly to improve security throughout the campus.

SILOS PREVENTED LEGACY SYSTEM OPTIMIZATION

SVA administrators asked Idesco to find ways that the college could do more with its existing systems, which included an access control system with more than 400 proximity card readers for door access, along with standalone wireless door locks.

"Proximity card readers provide ease of use, strong security, valuable access control information for security investigations and a high degree of control for the academic and administrative departments that maintain the spaces," Tomescu says. "And wireless door locks with built-

in proximity card readers allow for rapid deployment of security to areas lacking existing infrastructure nearby."

SVA also maintains more than 700 surveillance cameras in outdoor and/or public areas such as sidewalks, building perimeters, entrance lobbies, common areas, stairways, hallways, classrooms, basements and roofs. Tomescu believes that HD megapixel cameras offer the best option for recognition during live streams and footage review. The school also uses infrared cameras to monitor high-traffic areas with fluctuating light conditions, such as lobbies and building exteriors.

Although these legacy access and video solutions were a step in the right direction, Idesco was called in so the solutions could be optimized.

"We analyzed and reviewed SVA's security platform and found that their solution did not allow them to use their system to its fullest capacity," says Michael Troiani, service manager at Idesco. "Basically, their campus was comprised of isolated silos of information that did not interact. Unconnected, this data's full value is not fully maximized. Our objective was to connect

data silos, create software connections that mitigate risk, secure all buildings and protect people and property."

SVA reviewed all options, selected a new security platform and asked Idesco for help to implement the system that they wanted.

MIDDLEWARE INTEGRATES DISPARATE TECHNOLOGIES

To facilitate the upgrade, Idesco enlisted the help of braXos Security Software, a specialist in physical security middleware. Middleware is the critical software that sits in between a security engine and any other application or system requiring connection. BraXos developed a software application to pull the existing access control database including all time zones, access levels, card readers, inputs/outputs, and schedules and import them into the newly specified system.

"BraXos security software had a tremendous amount of software development for this project," says Tom Skoulis,

chief connection officer at braXos. "We spent about 200 hours developing the application based on SVA's requirements. The scope of work was tremendously challenging. Without the exceptional teamwork from Idesco and SVA, the project completion timeline would have been greatly extended. The leading edge vision brought about by Idesco, in collaboration with SVA, is extremely rare. The results for SVA were tremendously impactful not only in the short-term, but will be for years to come."

Troiani and Idesco Operations Manager Brian Simpson analyzed and reviewed the data from SVA's existing system to supply braXos with clear, organized information, which helped cut the transition time in half. Due to the high level of coordination, the project was completed within three months and the system transition was seamless. In addition to Tomescu's involvement, Brian Nakahara, SVA's IT director, also played a large role in the upgrade.

"We wanted to work with a company

From left to right: Kenneth Luguya (SVA), Cosmin Tomescu (SVA), Andrew Schonzeit (Idesco), Nick Agjmurati (SVA), Michael Troiani (Idesco), Isat Paljevic (SVA), Brian Nakahara (SVA), Brian Simpson (Idesco).

that had intimate knowledge of the hardware and could implement a new system quickly," Nakahara says. "Working together as a team allowed us to make important changes to our security system, changes that can help other schools out there."

SECURITY COMMAND CENTER GETS A RENOVATION

Migrating to a new security platform allowed SVA to implement significant changes in its infrastructure. The college's security command center — a centrally located office used for communications coordination as well as investigations, data collections, strategic meetings and emergency response efforts — was renovated with new computers and screens that are used for continuous passive monitoring of all critical high-traffic areas on campus. The new system offers long-term digital archive capabilities that allow security staff to access historic footage quickly and efficiently. SVA also added new touchscreen workstations and all-in-one PCs at security stations, saving desk space and enabling officers to more easily interact with the surveillance and access control systems.

The direct involvement with SVA's security and IT team had a tremendously positive impact on this upgrade and helped drive the project's success. SVA not only assisted with defining the scope of work, but also rolled up their sleeves and waded into the applications, conversions and integrations in order to transition to the exact system the school required. The benefits SVA received were a seamless access control system transition, without compromise of the facility, and an on-time availability for new student and faculty badging and access.

"This project showed that a security system conversion can be a smooth process." says Troiani. "The entire process was done without ever compromising physical security of people or assets."

SVA BREAKS NEW GROUND WITH A FUTURISTIC APPROACH

In the fall of 2016, SVA plans on opening its newest building, a 150,000-square-foot, 14-story residence hall that will accommodate more than 500 students and feature a number of specialized facilities and amenities. Given the college's recent security upgrade and revamped infrastructure, ensuring that the building's future residents, staff, operations and tech-

nology will be kept as safe as possible has become a much easier goal to achieve.

"Schools can now get the security system they need at an affordable price point," says Andrew Schonzeit, president of Idesco Corp. "The key is to define clearly what you want to achieve with your solution and discuss all options with your integrator. Always look at the bigger picture and anticipate future requirements, not only in terms of products but also for service and support."

Keeping students safe and secure now and in the future is the motivation behind the recent installation at SVA. Idesco, SVA and braXos proved that teamwork is a crucial element to any successful security system upgrade.

It's important for schools around the country to open their doors not only to students, but keep the door of communication open among the top executives and school administrators to help keep security goals top of mind. When everyone involved understands the benefits of a centralized security platform, effective changes can take place that protect not only physical assets but also the most valuable asset of all — our students. **CS**

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Integration Improves Registration Process

At SVA, the registrar's office handles all student, faculty and staff ID card requests. The college also creates special IDs for outside vendors and for select SVA events for an added layer of security.

"During the upgrade, we preserved the existing ID-issuing process and, over the course of our migration we were able to export all existing student, faculty and staff ID photos," states Cosmin Tomescu, SVA's chief information officer. "The integration between all systems was done in-house, and our updated records are now synchronized across all systems every hour, seven days a week."

All ID templates were updated to reflect SVA's latest branding standards and were upgraded from one to three ID-printing stations, all of which use faster Fargo printers.

Additionally, the school's in-house developers created a custom web portal for all academic departments, which allowed them to assign specific door access to students and faculty within their spaces. SVA's portal integrates with both Active Directory SSO and Colleague in order to access the information required to maintain these security levels (active students, active faculty, course information, classroom location, schedules, etc.). In addition, reports can be run through the portal when needed.

SECURITY SOLUTIONS FOR SAFER SCHOOLS