



# NYC College Security Upgrade Aces Tough Test

For the School of Visual Arts' access control and surveillance project, the relationship between integrator, software developer and administrative stakeholders played a key part. Get educated in what it takes to achieve similar success on campus.  
**By Monique Merhige**

**F**OR MORE THAN SIX DECADES, New York City's School of Visual Arts (SVA) has been a leader in the education of artists, designers and creative professionals. In order to protect its 6,000+ students and more than 15 buildings at its Manhattan campus, SVA is also setting a shining example of today's higher education security opportunities for stakeholders and systems integrators alike.

With its mix of classrooms, facilities and offices occupying space on campus, safety has always been a priority for the college. SVA has invested heavily to ensure a safe environment for its students, faculty and staff, and maintains a total security staff of 93. In addition to ensuring the personal safety of its community, it has been critical for the school to secure computer equipment, specialized technology and other high value academic and administrative assets.

Given its diffuse campus, large commuter-student population and commitment to civic responsibility, SVA's security interests also extend beyond its own buildings, and occasionally, the New York Police Department has asked the college to provide video footage for ongoing investigations that are unrelated to campus activities. How can today's security providers work with campus brass to define and address such wide-ranging security needs? Discussions with SVA stakeholders along with its security integrator reveal pitfalls and procedures taken to pass this challenging college test.

### Integrator Entrenched in Education Market

SVA already had standalone video surveillance and door-access systems on campus, but was interested in upgrading its overall security system to create a safer environment for all and to simplify 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 to reduce the cost of recabling every location."

## CASE STUDY: CENTRALIZING CAMPUS SECURITY



The School of Visual Arts worked closely with Idesco to understand its needs and integrate disparate systems such as its existing video surveillance cameras and access control card readers into a more centralized platform to produce much greater functionality.

In May 2014, the school's administrators contacted Idesco Corp. to initiate the upgrade. SVA's security partner since 2011, Idesco focuses on the education market as one of its key verticals and has worked with other high-profile New York City campuses, including New York University and Pace University. The Manhattan-based integrator has built a reputation for being on the forefront of technologies such as access control, video surveillance, ID badging systems, biometrics, turnstiles and visitor management.

"Idesco has secured some of the largest campuses in the Tri-State [New York, New Jersey, Connecticut] area so we know what it takes to design, manage, install

and service a security system that will keep students and staff safe and secure," says Idesco President Andrew Schonzeit.

Meanwhile, Tomescu and other SVA administrators could take solace in knowing they had a trusted security advisor on board to work closely with their IT and security departments to effectively upgrade their current system and build on their relationship. "We relied on Idesco to help us upgrade our current system and advise us on the best path to get to a state-of-the-art system in a virtual environment," says Tomescu.

SVA's existing access control system included 400+ HID proximity card readers and Mercury panels for door access, along with standalone wireless door locks. Tomescu notes that the prox card readers provide ease of use, strong security, valuable access control information for security investigations plus a high degree of control for the academic and administrative departments that maintain the spaces.

The college 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.

### Software Spurs Integration Success

SVA asked Idesco to find ways that the college could do more with this existing system; the answer keyed on more sophisticated integration. "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 isolated silos of information that did not interact. Unconnected, this data's

value is not fully maximized."

Working with Idesco, SVA reviewed all options and selected a new S2 Enterprise security platform. To facilitate the upgrade, Idesco enlisted the help of braXos Security Software, a specialist in physical security middleware — the 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. "We spent about 200 hours developing the perfect application based on SVA's requirements," says Tom Skoulis, chief connection officer at braXos.

Troiani and Brian Simpson, Idesco's operations manager, crunched the data from SVA's existing system to supply braXos with clear, organized information. "They took on the challenge of SVA's security system transition and cut the amount of time in half, at minimum, says Skoulis."

Propelled by the high level of coordination among security integrator, software provider and end user, the project was completed within three months.

### Command Center, Registrar Capitalize

Migrating to a new security platform allowed SVA to implement significant changes in its infrastructure. The college's security command center was revamped 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

Teamwork on the installation involved (l-r): Kenneth Luguya (SVA), Cosmin Tomescu (SVA), Andrew Schonzeit (Idesco), Nick Agjmurati (SVA), Michael Troiani (Idesco), Isat Paljevic (SVA), Brian Nakahara (SVA) and Brian Simpson (Idesco).



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.

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," says Tomescu. "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 fac-

ulty within their spaces. SVA's portal integrates with both Active Directory SSO (single sign-on) and Colleague by Ellucian student information system.

SVA staff not only assisted with defining the scope of work, but also rolled up their sleeves and waded into the applications, conversions and integrations to transition to the exact system the school required. It proved to be a strong example of the value of the integrator-client relationship, yielding seamless transition for the end user.

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

### **New Ground & Future Safety**

This fall, SVA plans on opening 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, Idesco has helped ensure that the goal of keeping the building's future residents, staff, operations and technology as safe as possible is much easier to achieve.

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

Idesco, SVA and braXos reinforced that teamwork is a crucial element to any successful security system upgrade. While most security dealers are familiar with the basic security risks at schools today, it is still imperative to find out everything about the school upfront — like the intricacies of an urban campus in this case — to make the best recommendations possible. **SSI**

MONIQUE MERHIGE is President of security industry PR firm Infusion Direct Marketing & Advertising Inc.