

7 frequent mistakes when selecting CCTV and integrated security solutions

How to ensure a CCTV solution is fit for the purpose intended

INTRODUCTION

A lot has been written about CCTV. Some of this centres on its benefit in deterring criminal activity. And at least an equal amount is about how it erodes civil liberties and is driving the rise of the 'Big brother' state. Wherever you sit in the debate, it is impossible to ignore the importance of CCTV.

Over the years, official sources of information from government or its executive agencies have attempted to lay the foundations for the industry. 5 years ago the Government published 'Home Office CCTV Operational Requirements Manual 2009', a largely technical guide to help specify systems correctly in the digital age.

In 2014, the Information Commissioner's Office published a CCTV Code of Practice, 'In the picture: A data protection code of practice for surveillance cameras and personal information', which focuses on the privacy issues surrounding digital video images and the use of this data. This updated an information stream that began in the Data Protection Act 1998.

Perhaps the strongest regulatory requirement linked to the industry is the requirement for private sector security workers that operate or monitor CCTV systems to be licensed as security guards with the UK's Security Industry Authority (SIA).

To some, 'new technology' - computer based digital systems - may seem like a relatively recent development. However, the London Borough of Newham piloted projects with face recognition software back in 1998! Despite being around for the better part of two decades and the vast superiority of digital systems, there is a lack of industry expertise on digital technology and its image processing and automation capabilities.

Today the CCTV industry escapes proper regulation, and like all unregulated industries the experience of many is of 'cowboy' installers selling inappropriate systems backed with poor service. But how can an industry that is so important to business and society have escaped proper regulation and oversight?

The threat to public safety is now as serious as it has ever been; and the requirement for security to protect public infrastructure and private businesses and high value assets is equally important. The increasing concerns over privacy, who has access to CCTV imaging, and the use and misuse of data are not going to disappear.

Taken together, these issues mean it is a certainty that at some point the industry will need to become properly regulated, with all private and public sector organisations, systems and personnel required to meet mandatory compliance standards. In the meantime there is a gap between official guidance and industry best practice.

In this guide we fill the gap by discussing 7 frequent mistakes made by organisations and businesses when buying CCTV systems. This helps to ensure that CCTV solutions meet your specific needs for protection, prevention and identification while delivering the best value.

1. Failing to make sure your supplier adheres to industry standards

Issue:

This is an unregulated industry and it relies on CCTV service providers to self-regulate. This includes processes such as keeping up with technological change and following guidance from government, executive agencies or other independent bodies that set standards. Above all there is a need to follow the conventions of professional and ethical business practice.

From 'one-man bands' with limited resources, cowboy installers providing poor products and services, or large security companies that are biased towards old analogue technology, the fact is that many suppliers fail to self-regulate, provide up to date advice and deliver value through providing the most appropriate solutions.

Solution:

Select a supplier with industry accreditations. One key accreditation is the NSI (National Security Inspectorate) Approved Gold or Silver certification. The BSI (British Standards Institution) first published a management system for governing quality assurance of alarm and CCTV systems for use in security applications and has been developed and updated the standard continually.

Insurance is often a consideration for many businesses commissioning CCTV or integrated systems. NSI and BSI are some of the most important things to look for when establishing the credentials of a potential CCTV service provider.

2. Not examining the suppliers track record and taking up references

Issue:

The recession has led to large numbers of people becoming self-employed or setting up companies as a vehicle through which to ply their trade. Businesses owned by solo operators may be well intentioned, however they have limited resources and it is unrealistic to expect full expertise in every aspect of consultation, installation and ongoing services and support. There are also poorly intentioned cowboy operators so make sure you carefully consider the track record and references of potential suppliers.

Solution:

Select a supplier with named existing clients and look for case studies. Are any existing clients in your industry, sector or niche? If so they should have knowledge and experience of any specialised requirements.

Look for testimonials and case studies that back up claims of experience. Don't stop there. Ask to speak to - or better still visit a reference site - and meet the person who commissioned the system. If requests like these provoke the wrong kind of responses from your potential suppliers you can eliminate them from your purchasing process and look elsewhere.

3. Not checking if the supplier is fully capable and committed to meeting your business needs

Issue:

Many businesses may possess the capability to provide services. However the quality of the services and their levels of commitment and engagement may not be so obviously apparent.

Big suppliers can be slow and unresponsive; small ones may have holes in their service capability or can be unreliable.

Solution:

Select a supplier that is large enough to have the skills, expertise, experience and services to meet your needs, but small enough to mean that you are valued as a customer. SLAs are a valuable tool for governing the quality of services that are delivered.

With the expectation of service levels formally set out, it is easy to see if the supplier is meeting the expectation and straightforward to challenge them when they do not. Ensure any contract clauses for terminating SLAs are reasonable from the perspective of your business.

4. Failing to consider the quality of hardware, cabling and installation work

Issue:

Practically anyone can buy a domestic quality multi-camera kit from a hobbyist consumer electronics shop for £300 and install it. Many cowboy and one-man band installers use budget low-end equipment. However, do such systems meet the requirements of your insurers? And it's not just hardware. Installation work is just as important too. Cameras, cabling, control and recording devices need to be properly configured and positioned and fixed so that they are free from easy tampering.

Solution:

Select a supplier that fits high quality hardware and provides cabling and installation work to the highest standards. The latest high quality digital Megapixel HD CCTV cameras produce superior images to analogue systems. They often reduce costs through simplifying installations and the resolution and software processing may mean fewer cameras are required. Wireless CCTV systems are also useful for reducing costs and accelerate and create less disruption during installation.

Even though using newer technology may mean faster, simpler or lower cost installation, all work needs to be carried out to recognised standards. Once again look out for companies with NSI Approved Gold and Silver certification and accreditation to BSI BS EN 50132-5-3:2012.

5. Not purchasing a solution designed to meet operational requirements

Issue:

The Surveillance Camera Code of Practice published by the Home Office in 2012 is aimed at governing the use of CCTV systems in public places. It also acknowledges a 'complex landscape of ownership' – many privately operated outdoor systems overlook public areas - and focuses on the need to use systems appropriately in the pursuit of a legitimate aim.

Essentially, it is necessary to define a legitimate reason for CCTV and obtain a solution fit for purpose. If a solution needs to be able to support prosecution by identifying an individual using facial recognition, an analogue system is unlikely to offer the resolution, processing and automation features required.

Solution:

Select a supplier with a consultative approach, time served experience and expert knowledge. Looking for expertise in the latest digital technologies and a reputation for delivering satisfied customers helps prevent you purchasing an inappropriate system.

A good tip is to find out about the supplier's process. Does it have experienced surveyors that assess your requirement before providing quotes? If a company provides quotes before understanding the requirements of your business, the site and operational requirements and objectives, then beware. It clearly does not take a consultative approach.

6. Failing to consider security system integration with alarms, access control etc.

Issue:

It is important to remember that CCTV is often just one element of a larger integrated solution for comprehensively monitoring and protecting a physical environment. Intruder alarms sense forced entry or movement within a secured space; fire alarms detect heat and smoke. Access control restricts access to permitted individuals. Integrating CCTV with these measures adds the visual dimension.

Solution:

Select a supplier with the know-how to design and install fully integrated systems. All work needs to be carried out in full compliance with all applicable Health & Safety requirements. Automated barriers and gates for access control make Health & Safety an important consideration because of the potential risk of physical injury that results if they are not correctly installed and maintained.

CCTV delivers the best value when deployed as an element of a fully integrated security solution. Besides tracking authorised and preventing unauthorised access, a major benefit of integrating CCTV as part of a larger security system is that it helps identify alarm triggers that are false-positives. This prevents security personnel or police being called out in error. Three or more false activations in a 12 month period may result in the withdrawal of police response.

7. Forgetting about the need for after sales service, maintenance and support

Issue:

Unfortunately, when it comes to CCTV maintenance and support, low quality service is the experience of many. You might require guidance on how to change an incorrect time and date stamp, to ensure CCTV evidence is accurate. Or cameras may not work, leaving you with a system that is about as useful as a set of dummy cameras and some “Smile! You’re on CCTV” signs!

For both of these examples and for any other scenario, there needs to be a clear strategy in place to obtain support. Any system considered critical needs to have a solid agreement in place to ensure assistance such as telephone support or an engineer site visit is provided within a timeframe that is acceptable to your business.

Solution:

Select a supplier with the highest standard of after sales, maintenance and support. Reference sites are perhaps the best way of checking that your expectations for ongoing maintenance and support can be met. As previously mentioned, the Service Level Agreement (SLA) is an essential tool. It spells out to the service provider exactly what is required and it sets out what can be reasonably be expected by you.

SUMMARY

Why select ic2 as your CCTV service provider?

ic2 is a leading mid-market CCTV provider and was established in 2001. The business is owned and managed by a team with a collective experience of over 100 years in the electronic security business. ic2 holds CCTV and security accreditations with NSI and BSI.

Whether the requirement is solely for CCTV, or for a new fully integrated system, ic2 provides the consultancy led services to specify, supply, install and support a full range of integrated electronic security solutions. This includes HD CCTV, Wireless CCTV, ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition), Remote Monitoring, Access Control, Gates & Barriers, PA Systems, Fire Alarms and Intruder Alarms.

Importantly, as digital technology shifts, the emphasis on security systems management is moving away from Security towards IT departments; ic2 is able to offer the expertise and services to relieve, and bridge, much of the burden.

A prestigious client list including luxury international boutique brands, top flight sporting venues, retail developments and educational and social environments demonstrates how solutions are deployed to meet a variety of requirements.

From deterring theft of high value luxury goods, to fan and public safety and child protection, solutions are deployed to meet a range legitimate purposes for which they are appropriate and fit for purpose.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

[Home Office CCTV Operational Requirements Manual 2009](#)

Home Office; Technical Manual; 2009

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/378443/28_09_CCTV_OR_Manual2835.pdf

[Surveillance Camera Code of Practice](#)

Home Office; 2013

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/204775/Surveillance_Camera_Code_of_Practice_WEB.pdf

[In the picture: A data protection code of practice for surveillance cameras and personal information](#)
ICO; CCTV Code of Practice; 2014

<https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1542/cctv-code-of-practice.pdf>

[NSI website](#)

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About Us

Keeping you safe and secure at all times

IC2 provide you with innovative solutions tailored to you and your sector. We are London-based with a national team of surveyors and engineers that work closely with our clients throughout the UK and internationally.

Our unique consultative approach allows us to tailor bespoke systems to your individual requirements, ensuring that your operational requirements are met.

We appreciate the need to demonstrate the best value to you every time and as a technology-led company, you can expect our cutting-edge and ground-breaking approach to serve your needs for many years to come.

Please feel free to contact us to discuss any requirements you may have. We are happy to give you impartial advice, should you have any queries.

