



Prepared for Any Emergency, Louisa County Public Schools Enhance Security with Vicon Solution

Background

The Louisa County Public Schools (LCPS) District, in northern Virginia, has more experience than most dealing with unexpected crisis. When a rare 5.8 magnitude earthquake struck the region just weeks after the start of the school year in 2011, security cameras inside the high school captured dramatic footage of ceilings collapsing while students and faculty scrambled to safety. That day, the district's high school and one elementary school were destroyed – representing 40 percent of Louisa County Public Schools' capacity. Against all odds, there were only six injuries and no fatalities. Equally amazing was the district's resourcefulness in getting its 4,600 students back to school almost immediately.

This summer, installation of a new district-wide surveillance system will be complete; the beautiful, newly-constructed high school, which opened in 2015, is the last building to come online with a new Vicon Valerus Video Management Solution. The system is already in place within the district's middle school and four elementary schools – including the new Jefferson Elementary School building. Vicon's ability to deliver and support a hassle-free, end-to-end solution that the district's in-house technicians can install, manage and maintain themselves made Valerus the right choice for the project.

The Plan

The LCPS District has a total of close to 400 Vicon cameras installed throughout its six schools. Most are new, IP megapixel models, although some older analog models connected to IP encoders remain in use due to budget constraints. Price sensitivities have also been addressed through extensive use of Vicon hemispheric cameras, placed at intersecting hallways, foyer areas and within the high school gym. Each does the work of four or more traditional models.

Organization

Louisa County Public Schools



Challenges

- Deliver a video management solution that could be installed, managed and maintained by the school district's own technicians with maximum autonomy
- Provide certification, training and direct end-user support as required by the district's staff
- Offer flexible monitoring capabilities to local law enforcement through ipads and smartphones
- Increase operational efficiencies through better search tools, remote access, system health monitoring and other software features

Solution

Valerus VMS and close to 400 Vicon cameras have been phased in across the six buildings in LCPS. Six networks will soon be combined into an enterprise solution once a district-wide fiber optic network is complete. The district's in-house electrician and technical staff have been empowered to install, configure and troubleshoot the system throughout the process, with direct support from Vicon's technical team.

Results

The County Sheriff's department is able to monitor cameras from laptops and smartphones over WiFi, providing greater assurance that they are prepared to deal with emergency situations, including the possibility of an active shooter. The features and accessibility of Valerus are allowing the district's IT and Facilities Management departments to operate more efficiently.

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~ David Szalankiewicz, *Facilities Director, Louisa County Public Schools*

To minimize demands on bandwidth, cameras currently connect to local Valerus Application Servers at each school. There are plans to bring all the cameras into a single system as soon as a county-wide fiber project is complete, hopefully within the next year. For now, because Valerus uses a web-based thin client, administrators can simultaneously open each school’s network in a separate tab and quickly jump between views.

A Tool for Law Enforcement

Earthquakes are not something school districts in Virginia typically plan for; sadly, worries over active shooter scenarios are always top-of-mind. To address this type of threat, Valerus is providing peace-of-mind for both the district administrators and the County Sheriff’s Department. LCPS Facilities Director, David Szalankiewicz (*known as Sal*) says, “Our Sheriff’s Department loves the Valerus platform because they can put it on their ipads, walk around with it, and immediately call up any camera in case of an emergency.” LCPS has installed WiFi throughout the district, so that in the case of an active shooter, law enforcement can visually assess the situation and attempt to locate the perpetrator before sending in officers.

Video evidence recorded by Valerus has also proven to be an indispensable tool in court hearings. “We export video all the time for the police,” Sal says. “They don’t need any special software to play it, and the video is so much clearer than it used to be, allowing us to accurately identify individuals. When we’re sitting in court and our attorney pulls out a CD with video on it, the defense attorney knows he’s done.”



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~ David Szalankiewicz, Facilities Director,
Louisa County Public Schools



Operational Efficiencies

Like the Sheriff's Department, Sal appreciates the convenience and flexibility of Valerus' feature-rich mobile interface and the ability to access the system from anywhere. Being a rural district, the school is subject to frequent power outages and snow is a regular problem throughout the winter. Sal says, "The system has saved me countless hours. In the past, if we had a snowstorm, I used to have to drive to school to see if the power was on and how much snow had fallen. Now, I can just log into the cameras, see what's happening, and determine if we're good to go."

Sal says that Valerus' powerful and easy-to-use search tools are also a time saver. "We're using the search tool to find incidents at least once a week, if not more. Whether it's an event on the playground or a car that drove onto the lawn, there's always something happening.

With Valerus, it's so much easier to find what we're looking for. We use the search tool to "paint" certain areas within a camera's view, and Valerus automatically shows us video clips of anything that happened in that particular spot. It's made us a lot more efficient."

As for the electricians and technicians responsible for maintaining the system, Valerus has eliminated plenty of headaches. They particularly appreciate the health monitoring tool, which immediately indicates if a camera is offline. "In the past, sometimes we wouldn't realize a camera was down until we went to do a search and discovered that the footage we needed wasn't there. It was a serious problem. Now, we can immediately see if any cameras need troubleshooting just by looking at the Valerus health dashboard," Sal explains.





Manufacturer Support

When LCPS considered VMS solutions, a prerequisite was finding a manufacturer who, in Sal's words, "would let us take ownership of it." The district desired as much autonomy as possible. "Vicon has been completely accommodating," says Sal. "After purchasing the system through a dealer, Vicon's technical team has supported our in-house guys directly with training and certification so that we feel completely in control. That hasn't been the case with other manufacturers we've worked with in the past."

For LCPS's lead electrician, putting in the Valerus system was the first time he had installed security cameras. He found the Valerus promise of "advanced simplicity" to be true. Sal says, "The system was very easy to configure. In no time, he was adding cameras to the tree, putting them in groups, and customizing the management interface for our needs. As soon as we have a few free hours, our next project is to import a floor plan of each school and create a map of camera locations that we can click on for easy call up. That's one of the advanced features we learned about at Valerus training."

Next Steps

As soon as the district-wide fiber project is complete, LCPS will consolidate the six separate Valerus systems onto a single server at the high school. The enterprise solution will make it easier to manage all cameras and access all recorded video through a single interface, and this can be done without making any changes to the system's existing licensing plan. The district also intends to upgrade all remaining analog cameras with high-resolution IP models as budgets permit.

Louisa County Public Schools District has already proven it can tackle any challenge head-on. When it comes to security threats, its new district-wide Valerus system will help to ensure this remains the case for the foreseeable future.



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