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Mount Royal University

Mount Royal University chooses Genetec Security Center for campus

Calgary higher education institution benefits from quick deployment of new security platform and cameras

The school that would become Mount Royal University, in Calgary, Alberta, was founded more than a century ago. Throughout its long and rich history, Mount Royal has changed its offerings and location while continuing to meet the needs of the community it serves. Today, that community includes almost 15,000 students and 1,700 faculty and staff.

In 1972, the school moved from downtown to the Lincoln Park neighborhood in southwest Calgary. Prior to Mount Royal's arrival, the area had been used as an air force base. This meant that the university provided open spaces with little intrusion. In the decades since, however, a lot has changed. As Peter Davison, Director of Security for Mount Royal, described it, "We basically sat on our own little island. But now, because of urban expansion, the campus is surrounded by commercial, residential, and retail environments."

The area around Mount Royal now includes an industrial campus and business park as well as suburban housing. While there are several benefits to this increased urban density, it does present new security challenges. In 2017, the university began looking into expanding its physical security system. What started out as a 10-year plan that would encompass several stages quickly became a 2-year plan that changed everything.

Some of the challenges of a legacy system

In the early 2000s, following increasing threats worldwide, Mount Royal deployed a video surveillance system. The

University had a budget to spend, which led to camera deployment with limited planning. "There was money spent but not with a lot of thought as to how the system was actually laid out. We used to look at a lot of hallways. And the system didn't cover many of the areas that needed surveillance," said Davison.

Additionally, the video system could not keep up with technological advancements or meet the University's emerging security needs. "We tried to put a multi-image sensor into one of our buildings, and the old system just couldn't handle it. We were constantly having cameras drop," explained Candice Merrill, Security Manager at Mount Royal. "We really needed an overhaul of the backend too."

Switching to Security Center

"Our original plan was to bring 16 cameras into Security Center and then, over the course of the next 3-10 years, start phasing out the old system. But, as soon as we got a look at the quality of the platform and the new cameras, that timeline quickly became 2 years," said Davison. The program that initially was to have taken until 2027 is now complete.

Convincing the University to allocate the funds over the reduced timeline was relatively straightforward. "Once they got a look at the system and its capabilities and we had defined a plan of how we were going to layout the cameras, they quickly signed-off," explained Davison.

For the security team, the decision to select Genetec software was greatly influenced by the open architecture and true unification. "One of the deciding factors in going with Genetec and Security Center was the ability to include our intrusion alarm and access control systems," said Merrill.

After the University finished switching to their new cameras and video management system, they began updating their access control system. This project as well as an alarm integration project began in March 2019. "Once everything is brought into the Security Center interface, we will be completely out of our legacy system," said Davison.

On-boarding personnel

One of the challenges with their previous legacy system was that it was very difficult to navigate. "Fewer than 50% of our people ever figured out how to use it properly. It was cumbersome, and you had to basically shut it down to go into a different program," said Davison.

Now, with the new security system, Davison estimates that 95% of the personnel are up to speed. "One of the great things about Genetec Security Center is that, when you have new people, it's really easy for them to figure it out. They can just hover their mouse over a button, and it tells them what it is. In our old system, if you didn't know, you couldn't find out on your own. You'd have to ask someone. Now, our personnel can self-teach, which is really helpful," said Merrill.

Improved security with new capabilities

Security personnel at Mount Royal have noticed major improvements since the switch, like the ability to bring up cameras on areas of interest. In their legacy system, the views were pre-set and operators couldn't alter them unless a supervisor went into the system and changed them. Now, with Security Center, views are still pre-set, but operators can easily change views and focus cameras on areas that require greater attention.

The new system also makes it easier to review footage because of the ability to synchronize views. Prior to the switch, operators had to go

back and forth from each camera individually. Now, "if you've got a person of interest on multiple cameras, synchronization allows you to search all those cameras at the same time. That's a big time-saver for us," said Davison.

The security team is also becoming much more operational with access control, and they especially like the schedule lock feature in Security Center. Their old system worked on a schedule, so all of the doors would unlock at 7:00 am regardless of whether anyone actually entered the facilities at that time. It also required going through 9 steps to unlock a door and relied on post-it notes to remind operators to lock particular doors at certain times.

With the new system, the doors are also on a schedule but they remain locked until someone actually needs to access the space. In addition, instead of requesting that security personnel lock doors, individuals leaving a space can now lock the doors themselves.

Getting the support they want

The success of the system is about more than just technology. It's also about the quality of the relationship that was built with the Genetec team. Technical support is particularly important to the security team at Mount Royal. "This is really huge for us. With our last company, we didn't get answers quickly. We didn't get the help that we needed generally. And everything took a few steps," explained Merrill.

"Whenever we asked questions about how to make the system better, we received a continuous sales pitch. But, with Genetec, we get answers and, often, we get them in person," added Davison. "The difference has been like night and day with Genetec," added Merrill.

Davison is also excited about the future as Mount Royal continues to explore the features in Security Center. They unified the system with their Code Blue stations for emergency situations. The value of the open platform is that the University knows they can adapt and easily add on to Security Center as their needs evolve.

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