Case Study

Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino

A Native American casino in Northern California invests in a networked-based security solution for more effective management of video and expeditious response to incidents

Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino is a Native American casino located in Mendocino County, California. With a gaming space of approximately 9,000 square feet, the casino is packed with 220 gaming machines, numerous card tables and a favorite local restaurant by the name of Creekside Café. Employing over 260 people and with a total capacity of 1200 guests, Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino draws in crowds of gaming enthusiasts looking to score the next big jackpot.

Business challenge

With thousands of people and hundreds of employees involved in various functions related to money moving in and out of Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino, video surveillance, even in accordance with the National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA), is an essential and intricate part of this heavy cash operating business. Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino, like the majority of casinos nationwide, did employ an older VCR-based analog security surveillance system but after 13 years of operation, they eventually began to realize that the outdated technology did not serve them as well as it once had.

With the need to respect the Sherwood Valley Gaming Commission and NIGA standards, Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino was accumulating a large amount of equipment and VCR tapes to record video footage from different sensitive areas around the casino. When incidents on the casino floor did occur, security operators were also constrained with a tedious and time-consuming process of having to remove a VCR tape, rewind it, search for the incident in question and also make sure to put a replacement tape back into the VCR recorder. This dated video recording technology ultimately caused delays in investigative procedures, and inhibited security operators to act swiftly in case of urgent security breaches such as table fraud, blacklisted patrons, or deceitful cash or key exchanges.

With notable expansion plans of a brand new facility which would be three times the size of the current casino looming in the near future, Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino also questioned whether it would be wise to transition their VCR-based system over to the new facility. Their concerns mainly revolved around whether their hardware matrix system would be able to effectively

manage the volumes of video and data that are required to uphold the standards of safety and security for all employees and guests of the new facility.

Keeping an open mind to the technology on the market and realizing the value of a solid relationship with their integrator, Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino turned to Brody Carlson, President of Connections IT to get the process of selecting a new video surveillance solution underway.

Casino security needs

In an environment such as a casino where the gaming floor is encompassed by masses of people, where the vulnerability of fraud is high, and where massive cash exchanges need to be under constant scrutiny, a major security system overhaul is a decision that is not made swiftly, nor taken lightly.

Given the mandate to find a new video surveillance solution, Mr. Kani Neves, Executive Director of the Sherwood Valley Gaming Commission, set out to rigorously research all the technologies

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available on the market in order to find the most optimal solution for the current and future needs of Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino. "We were looking for a solution that would allow us to stay up-to-date with the latest advancements in technology, and from an observational and surveillance standpoint, increase our ability to respond to incidents more efficiently," states Mr. Neves.

Knowing that there were many options from a technology selection standpoint, Mr. Neves demoed digital VCR solutions, DVR solutions and several advanced IP-based virtual matrix solutions but was ultimately looking for a system that would give his team the tools to be expeditious in response to time-sensitive incidents. More than that, he was looking for a system that would be flexible enough to allow him to keep some existing hardware investments, as well as more technologically advanced which would permit him to grow the system seamlessly in the future when the new 50,000 square foot facility would be ready.

When Mr. Neves finally had the chance to visit a nearby casino that had been using Genetec's advanced IP surveillance solution, Omnicast, he quickly realized, hands-on, the benefits that a surveillance system of such calibre could offer Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino.

The perfect solution

More than what they originally expected, the new system fulfilled all of Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino's needs and was the perfect fit for their security team, providing them with even more system functionalities than they ever dreamed possible. Initially, the 170 existing analog Pelco cameras were integrated on the virtual matrix system and another 25 new IP cameras were installed in sensitive cash areas and other more vulnerable parts of the casino. The entire system runs off three servers, including the use of one failover server for an additional back-up of archived video. "The flexibility of the system is key," says Mr. Neves. "The fact that Omnicast can manage an originally analog-based system and then can still give us the ability to move comfortably into the future as everything goes IP-based is certainly a great advantage to have."

Although in the beginning, coming from a VCR-based technology, the security operators were somewhat intimidated by the advanced technology, they soon realized how easy it was to maneuver though the intuitive interface as well as how simple it was to implement their policies and procedures into the system. "The interface was a huge huge bonus," said Mr. Neves. "There are multiple ways of doing one or two different functions, allowing for so much adaptability. If one person wants to use the mouse to control the PTZ, or the keyboard, they have that option. And if some operators are not comfortable with the new technology, they still even have the option of using the old joystick. Simply put, you can really custom-fit yourself to the system."
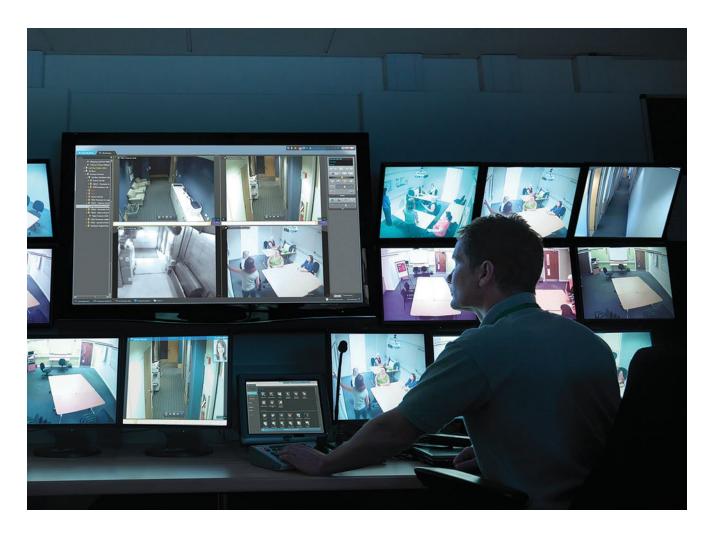
In addition to the impressive flexibility and user-friendliness of the Omnicast system, Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino's security team quickly took advantage of its other cutting-edge features. They began using the advanced alarm notifications and motion detection integration to monitor areas such as cashier posts and highly-sensitive entry and exit points throughout the facility. Also, for the table games that were intended to be monitored 24 hours per day, they used Omnicast's dynamic boost quality functionality to configure cameras to CIF resolution when there was no detected motion, and then 4CIF when motion was triggered within the video.

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Using this functionality allowed Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino to not only archive more pertinent data in higher quality, but also contributed to significant bandwidth savings.

A few key employees as well as the integrator have also become accustomed to using the remote access capabilities of the system. Since only commissioners can approve jackpots won over $10,000, the remote access feature of Omnicast has proven to be extremely beneficial, as authorities can access video directly from their home to approve such wins or even review other video where suspicion or fowl play may have been involved. Additionally, in case of unidentifiable technical issues, their integrator, Connections IT, can also remotely connect to the system to see if they can pinpoint any problems, providing immediate support.

As Mr. Neves was "very happy" with the implementation of the system, he stated the following to reiterate to the contentment of his Omnicast selection: "From an observation and surveillance standpoint, the work is going to be the same. Just the tools that we have to be able to do things, to respond quicker, and to look into events expeditiously are much more advanced. [Omnicast] has enhanced everything that we were trying to do."

The Benefits

As highly sensitive areas, cash and key exchanges, and critical access points throughout the casino are being monitored by operators daily, the tangible benefits are becoming more obvious. Already, they have been able to validate the fabrication of some patrons' complaints, quickly identify customers who have been blacklisted, and catch visitors playing club member cards that have been accidently left in the machine, all together avoiding major legal implications.

Not having to deal with VCR tapes, the ease of archiving and archive retrieval was an additional feature they came to really benefit from as well. "If the operator happens not to catch [an incident] while watching the video footage, the ease of going back through the archive, pulling it up on screen almost instantaneously and letting the security personnel know the details as they walk out to address the situation, has helped us improve our response times," states Mr. Neves.

Nevertheless, the flexibility of Omnicast's open-architecture platform has certainly been the most important benefit for Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino. "We needed a system that would conform to our existing setup with analog and coax cables everywhere, give us the ease and flexibility of new technology but yet also, would be able to expand and adapt to our new casino and

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new environment," states Mr. Neves. "Omnicast did that, and that is the reason why Genetec has been the best solution for us."

With plans in the near future to build the brand-new facility that will boast an additional 400 game tables and that will be more amenities based with more commercial areas, sports bars and restaurants, Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino will need to triple the amount of cameras in their current location and Omnicast will effectively be able to accommodate all their growth objectives. "The Genetec solution has enabled us to continue to grow and be a part of the new technology of the near future, and that is a big asset," claims Mr. Neves.

Ultimately, choosing Omnicast amongst a vast selection of other solutions on the market has certainly proven to be the best decision for Sherwood Valley Rancheria Casino. Today, their guests are safe and their heavy cash operating business is protected while tomorrow, their expansion will definitely have the same level of heightened security.

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