

# Hasselt



Photo credit: Philippe Van Gelooven

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**Branch**

Cities

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**Location**

Hasselt, Limburg, Belgium

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**Products**

Security Center, Omnicast, AutoVu

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**Partners**

The Safe Group

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## How a bustling Belgian city cut crime by 22% in five years

Hasselt was founded in the seventh century and is the capital of the Belgian province of Limburg, in the northeast of the country. This Flemish city includes the old city center of Hasselt, plus seven boroughs and a number of suburbs and settlements. The city boasts many historical sites, and with a modest population of just over 75,000, it has managed to retain its picturesque charm. Access to most of the old city center is limited exclusively to pedestrians, and the center is surrounded by a ring road known as De Groene Boulevard (the Green Boulevard). Hasselt University and two colleges make this city a real student center. Using joint security technology, the city and the police are working together to provide optimum protection for this bustling old city.

### Challenge: Gaps in security technology are putting additional pressure on resources

Over the years, a patchwork of video systems using analog and IP cameras had been installed. This made it difficult for the police and city officials to share information. For every investigation, police officers had to ask the city for video footage, which first had to be retrieved on USB sticks before they were able to begin reviewing the evidence. Even obtaining images and video footage from local establishments was a time-consuming, manual process. The police was soon overwhelmed and the city was obliged to find a better solution. The police also needed new, modern headquarters where they could establish a command center equipped with the latest security technology, enabling them to respond more efficiently to events in the city and suburbs.

### Solution: A unified security platform with considerable benefits

The police in Hasselt currently monitor more than 200 cameras using a unified security platform, the Genetec™ Security Center. With the help of their integration specialist, The Safe Group, the city was able to implement a so-called triangle strategy, in which a large number of fixed, temporary, and permanent mobile cameras are combined to increase safety on the streets. The police also installed the Security Center AutoVu™ automatic license plate recognition system in three patrol cars, which helps to quickly trace stolen vehicles and criminals. Agents are now able to request video images and information directly from the new command center in the case of emergencies and investigations. The Security Center Federation™ feature also makes it possible to access images from Genetec video

systems at local establishments, once the necessary permission has been obtained. The city is now reaping the benefits of this new security platform, as crime has decreased by 22% and the police has collected fines of EUR 21,000 from illegal dumping in their jurisdiction.

### With various parties now working together on the unified Security Center platform, the city has seen an improvement in its security.

Police work in Hasselt has become faster and smarter. “Campus H”, a new emergency service base, has also been constructed to expand surveillance throughout the city. Campus H includes a police station, an emergency center, a fire station, and a prison. The police station features a new, state-of-the-art control room with large video wall and workstations. From the control room, police officers are able to monitor video footage 24/7.

“On the very first day, we were able to prevent the theft of a motorcycle thanks to the Security Center platform. It took our team less than 10 hours to find the suspect and close the case,” said Philip Pirard, chief of the Limburg Regio Hoofdstad police force.

And that was only the start for Hasselt. In the past five years, crime has been reduced by 22% and the number of traffic accidents by 15%. The city has also installed temporary and mobile cameras at popular dumpsites, resulting in fines of EUR 21,000. Mobile cameras are also used by the city to tackle disturbances.

“Once an incident has been reported, our team immediately turns to the Security Center platform to see what is happening. Images appear on our video wall in just two clicks of the mouse. Our staff can then follow suspects through the city and provide assistance to the emergency services. At the same time, during investigations there’s no longer any need to go and request video footage, or to save evidence on USB sticks. Thanks to the Security Center platform, our incident response speed is unprecedentedly high,” explains Pirard.

### Cooperation as the foundation for a safer city

The success achieved in Hasselt is largely due to the Federation feature, which allows the police to monitor various individual systems from one centralized location. Staff now monitor 100 police cameras at Campus H, as well as 130 city cameras located throughout Hasselt.

“The wider community is also working with the police. Hasselt University, various local establishments, and three suburbs have given permission for the footage from their Genetec video management systems to be linked to the control room at Campus H. When an incident occurs, they simply need to give the police access to certain cameras, after which staff are able to analyze images at their desks,” said Bart Reekmans, detective and camera network manager with the Limburg Regio Hoofdstad police force.



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The open architecture of Security Center means that the city has been able to continue using its existing equipment. This has reduced costs significantly. With assistance from their installation partner, The Safe Group, it was also possible to implement a triangle strategy. Using this strategy, surveillance can be expanded by deploying temporary and mobile cameras at specific locations and events.

“The triangle strategy is ideal for a city like Hasselt. It means that a large area can be monitored, and extra cameras can be set up during major events in the city, or in the case of new criminal developments. The strategy allows the city to adapt quickly, while costs are kept low,” stated Ilja Theuwissen, CEO of The Safe Group.

### More efficient investigations with AutoVu systems for automatic license plate recognition

In Hasselt, the triangle strategy includes the use of AutoVu automatic license plate recognition cameras. Two traffic police vehicles have been equipped with the automatic license plate recognition system, which is connected to the national criminal registry and database of criminal offenders.

While out on patrol, officers are now alerted to stolen vehicles, vehicles that do not meet technical requirements, and uninsured drivers. Every system is portable, so if necessary, the team can transfer the cameras to a different vehicle.

“Our investigations are faster with the AutoVu automatic license plate recognition system. If a particular vehicle is used in a crime and we know the license plate in whole or in part, all we need to do is check the system to see if the vehicle has recently been scanned. We can also enter the license plate in our database and get an immediate notification when and if our officers spot the vehicle while on patrol,” said Reekmans.

## Onto the next expansion phase

In the future, Hasselt aims to install cameras beyond the Groene Boulevard, in order to expand surveillance. The team is also considering combining other leading technologies with the platform, such as body cameras and video analytics.

“That’s the beauty of Security Center: it’s incredibly flexible. We’re expanding the system with the technologies we need and making the city safer at our own pace. But the biggest advantage is that we have started to collaborate much more with both the city and local establishments. Information is now readily available and our police can work more efficiently. And the 22% reduction in crime rates speaks for itself: everyone is a lot safer,” Pirard concluded.