

Maintaining DVRs can catch criminals

Bad boys, bad boys, whatcha gonna do? Whatcha gonna do when they come for you?

That's the tune I whistle when reviewing security video of burglaries and other crimes here in Washington County. Having the sheriff's department as a client and being president of Brenham Washington County CrimeStoppers has me playing a dual role when video is available showing thieves doing their deeds.

With my consultant's hat on first my job is to pinpoint the camera angles and times that show the criminals and then carefully extract the video files and digital picture shots. These critical videos and stills are first used for identification purposes and then for prosecution procedures in a court of law.

Since more and more business and homes now have security cameras and DVRs (Digital Video Recorders) recording critical areas and watching for criminal activities, the settings and maintenance of those DVRs have become very important.

Video that is in focus with good lighting along with both close up and wide views can make the difference between solving a crime or having just another



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incident added to the crime statistics in Brenham or the county.

Owners and operators of security DVRs: Please help us get this very useful crime fighting tool by checking or fixing the settings on your equipment. First and foremost, make sure the DVR is powered up and in RECORD mode. This may sound simple

and even stupid, but since DVRs are usually hidden in a closet they are very seldom viewed or checked for operation.

Get into a pattern of eyeballing the DVR and its red RECORD light on every Friday just before you leave work or get home from the office. I pick Friday as the weekly check day due to the high incidence of crime on the weekend.

Whether you already have a security camera configuration or you are about to buy one, I highly recommend you purchase a permanent monitor to continuously display the live grid of camera shots. This way you can quickly see all components are up and running along with being able to instantly verify the camera angles are correct.

You would be surprised the number of times I have been called in to view an incident but the camera that had the shot or view I needed was moved or even dis-

abled. Just as often I can rewind the video and then see the yahoo who altered the view. That is when the statistic that 80 percent of crimes at work are inside jobs becomes apparent.

Next please check the clock on the DVR and make sure the time is correct. This again sounds simplistic but most of those DVRs do not automatically adjust themselves for daylight saving times so that means an unattended DVR will have the incorrect time half of the year.

Wrong DVR times causes all sorts of problems for guys like me, law enforcement, and even the judicial system. It can become quite confusing with the DVR clock is not set correctly when you are trying to find a specific event that happened say at 3 on a Sunday morning and the DVR was 13 hours and 21 minutes slow. Doing the math when you are fast forwarding and rewinding the video can be quite frustrating.

On top of all that even if you find the video view, all involved have to still calculate the time difference related to other places, events, and timelines. Crafty defense lawyers have a field day with crime video that have incorrect date and/or time stamps. Please eliminate the confusion and legal vulnerability by regularly checking for the correct date and time on your DVR.

When there is a security event like a break-in, theft or other criminal mischief that requires law enforcement, jump on it right away. Since all DVRs have a limited amount of hard drive space to store security video, most are set to overwrite the oldest media.

This timeframe of availability is determined by a number of factors like the amount of hard drive space installed (at least 500 GB), the number of cameras in use and if the recording mode is continuous, motion activated or even event/alarm activated.

The first thing I do when called either by the DVR owner or law enforcement is check how much time we have before the target event to be reviewed is overwritten. Once in a while it is too difficult to get large amounts of video extracted from the DVR and we have to make sure we have all the stills and short video clips copied from the DVR before it is lost.

Overwriting is a good thing since it allows endless video with either at least one week or even multi-month storage window. A good rule of thumb is to have 1 TB (1,000 GB) per 16 cameras with continuous recording mode. Motion activated recording saves a ton of space and greatly widens your availability window, but things can get missed if the camera motion detection

grid is not properly configured.

Lighting is a critical component on security video and that goes double for outside camera shots. Try to set up continuous night lighting outside and inside so the views will show up well 24 hours a day. Do not rely on motion detection lighting or infra-red LEDs since the distance and clarity of those views are challenged.

After the video has been successfully extracted I put on my CrimeStoppers hat and go off the clock to get the video and pictures out to the public so we can pay a cash rewards for tips leading to arrests.

We got some excellent video and stills of two people who broke into the Lakeside store just south of Lake Somerville on Highway 36 North on Dec. 26 at 4:10 a.m. You have watch these two go after the safe with a sledge hammer in the YouTube video at www.BrenhamCrimeStoppers.com.

Bottom line: Save me and cops some work by properly maintaining your security DVRs so the video can help put those bad boys away!

Next week's column: Droid Smart-Phone.

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