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Enfield blazes the IP trail

The adoption of IP technology can be a daunting task, but Alan Gardner at the Enfield Public Safety Centre believes there are clear benefits to be had, especially the ability to offer a range of services, including CCTV and alarms, all integrated into one communications and control platform.

THE ENFIELD PUBLIC SAFETY Centre, under the control of CCTV manager Alan Gardner, is going IP. Not just digital – that was done years ago – but IP, the technology that provides a universal bridge between disparate technologies. Everything from access control and alarms to CCTV and building management systems can be “IP enabled”, providing a shared method of communications and control that yields the closest thing to true integration available thus far.

Alan, a longstanding member of the CCTV User Group, is working with a User Group member company, Computer Networks Ltd (CNL – see directory for contact details). CNL’s IP Security Centre (IPSC) will link together CCTV, alarms, access control and just about anything else you care to hang on an IP network.

The objective is to create a monitoring centre in the Borough of Enfield that can look after council-owned buildings as well as other facilities such as schools, hospitals and bus and railway stations. As we outlined in an article two years ago (“Emergency Control”, CCTV Image, Spring 2004), the Enfield Public Safety Centre was built for just this purpose. It meets all the requirements for a BS5979 (Category 2) alarm receiving centre, including physical security, self-contained power supplies and controlled entry.

Road to integration

To date, the Centre has taken on a number of outside monitoring jobs including all of the monitoring for the neighbouring Borough of Waltham Forest, comprising some 56 cameras. Talks are also underway with other



IP’s answer to Spaghetti Jct



CNL’s IP Security Centre will control all of Enfield’s security systems

potential public sector clients, including schools, railways and hospitals, but Alan concedes it is a lengthy process which, he notes ruefully, is sometimes hampered by anti-competition regulations which directly conflict with the government’s anti-crime agenda.

Integration of alarms, access control and CCTV has been Alan’s goal since the Enfield Public Safety Centre took its first camera feed four years ago. However, he says it was difficult to find the technology that would make it happen. Within the CCTV and security manufactur-

ing sector, he says there was very little on offer that would achieve what he was looking for: an open architecture solution that was independent of any specific hardware.

Alan says he liked CNL, with a strong background in IT and IP networking, because “they came from outside the security sector, actually being in the IT sector, so they didn’t have any hang-ups about bespoke stuff, or ‘you must buy this in order to work with that.’”

CNL were very open to suggestions, he adds, and whenever he asked them if IPSC would perform a certain function, they were able to say yes and demonstrate it.

A key feature of the solution that Alan was looking for was a system that was entirely paperless. The paperless solution was vital because Alan didn’t want his staff spending all of their time typing letters or logging events on paper. More importantly, it all had to be accessible from the same terminal, so staff didn’t have to walk across the room to access a separate system, either to record or retrieve information.

“I wanted a paper-free system,” says Alan. “If I’m going to do lots of alarms and have to pay loads of admin staff to come in and write letters, email reports or fax things, then it’s not worth it... We gave them [CNL] a list of things, which they have put in, so it’s been developed as we wanted it.”

Babbage connection

Appropriately enough, perhaps in honour of the man who invented the first computer in the 19th Century, the first building to be connected to Enfield’s new IPSC infrastructure was Charles Babbage House (Interestingly enough, as a boy Babbage attended a school in Enfield).

At Babbage House, IPSC has linked into the CCTV system as well as the intruder alarms panel. In the event of an intruder alarm activation, or any activity on the motion detection sensors in the CCTV cameras,

a map of the area will pop up on the operator's workstation back at the Public Safety Centre and an audio link will be established with the site which enables the operator to talk to anyone in the building.

"Using the system, we can have a look around the site. Eventually we aim to go for a certain standardisation for video and video-alarm systems, but this is our first project really and we're learning from it," says Alan.

Currently, Alan is using Mobotix IP cameras at Babbage House. He likes Mobotix because they have good image quality and work well on the IP network. However, he says that IPSC is not hardware dependent and can be configured to use different cameras. As he says, "Never say no to new technology."

Explosive growth

Alan has been working on the Enfield Public Safety Centre project since early 2002, prior to the Centre being completed. "I had three cameras in December '02, three actual cameras and now we've got 200 or so, so it's been going very well in the past three and a half years," he says.

As mentioned earlier in this article, the Centre was always meant to be more than just a CCTV monitoring centre. Built to meet stringent insurance requirements, the Centre could withstand most forms of attack and continue operating. In the event of an emergency, it can serve as a Gold command centre and give police and other emergency services access to CCTV footage as well as video conferencing links to colleagues in other locations.

Alan explains that the Centre could potentially handle inputs from a thousand cameras or more, as well as alarm inputs from hundreds of buildings. Ultimately, he is looking to achieve economies of scale. "The



James Condron of CNL discusses IP with Alan Gardner

aim of the game," he says, "is the more we bring in, the cheaper overall it becomes."

Fibre options

One of the spin-off benefits of building the IP infrastructure is that once a building is connected to the network, the bandwidth (up to 1GB in some cases) can be used for non-monitoring tasks as well. Currently the Council has put over 20 kilometres of cabling in the ground, linking 12 major buildings.

Videoconferencing is one of the potential benefits. "We've done trials on it already on our network and it's good. We're just now looking at linking in the police stations and the civic centre and ourselves as the control point," Alan says. "IPSC will control the video switching so we have control from here."

When not being used by emergency services, Alan believes it can be made available to Council staff to save on travelling to meetings.

And the IP links have the added advantage that they can be used by the IT department in place of leased lines from telecom providers, thus providing connectivity to the corporate network, internet and email, as well as providing a connection for IP-telephony.

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It's apparent from talking to Alan that, for him, security is not just about CCTV. It's about providing a service that's reliable and flexible enough to take on a range of tasks, including alarm monitoring. And it's about working with other departments within the Council to get maximum "bang for the buck", in this case working closely with the IT department on the cabling infrastructure. In light of this, the investment in an all-around IP solution makes sense, both financially and operationally.

STANDARD RESPONSE

Onscreen flowcharts help guide operators through incidents

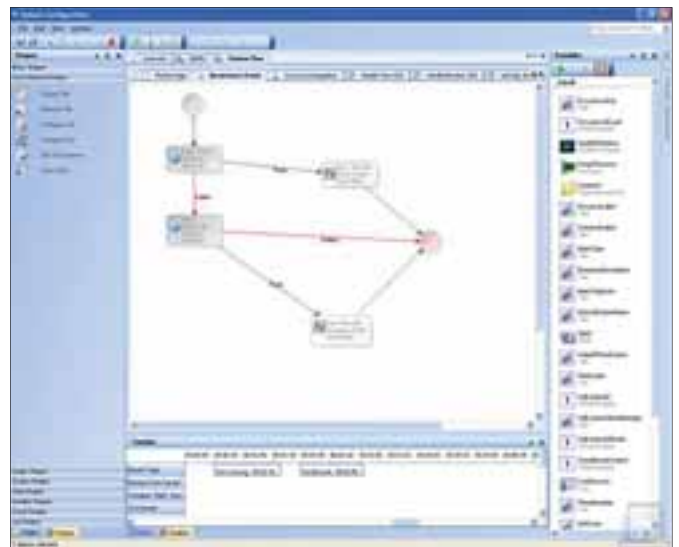
"THE MOST IMPORTANT BIT that I liked about IPSC was the virtual flowchart," says Alan, explaining how CNL's IPSecurityCenter software enables the manager or supervisor to pre-program a set of responses which an operator must follow in the event of an incident, such as an alarm activation.

With a user interface that looks like a simple drawing program, users can write a set of instructions that will guide the operator from start to finish, depending on the type of incident which has occurred. Using the example of an alarm activation, the instructions would pop up on the operator's screen when an alarm signal was received in the Centre.

"If they want you to phone the caretaker before the police, or if they want to go to a security guard or straightaway to the police depending on the circumstances of the alarm, that's what it will tell the operator to do," says Alan. "And because it's automated, it will – instead of saying phone this person – it will pop up and say, 'I have already emailed this person or faxed this person'. And all of the actions are audited."

And Alan adds: "It shouldn't be left to people to remember what to do, or to remember half of it or part of it. Sometimes you've got temporary staff and maybe they don't know what to do... There's nothing worse than going home at night wondering what happens if there's an emergency – will they do the right thing?"

The flowchart function uses a standard set of icons to represent different types of actions or decision points that can be reached in a process. Users can specify conditional statements (ie, if X then do Y), prompt users for information or ask them to do something and, as Alan explained, even



send an email or a fax, automatically filling in the relevant information.

"Sod's Law says that someday you'll try and find the book that has the emergency procedures in it and it won't have been updated or something's missing," says Alan. "But this software is centralised and it will never deviate from that process. And it won't allow someone to *not* do something."