Benefits of Standardizing the Video Security System

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For a variety of reasons many organizations have multiple disparate video security systems in place today. Over time changing needs, legacy equipment failures and the use of multiple security systems integrators can all result in different security systems in place throughout the same organization.

Multiple technologies ranging from simple DVRs to the latest Video Management Software and high definition IP cameras may be used. Variations in quality of evidence, standard operating procedures, equipment maintenance schedules, file format compatibility and more can cause significant reduction in efficiency and results.

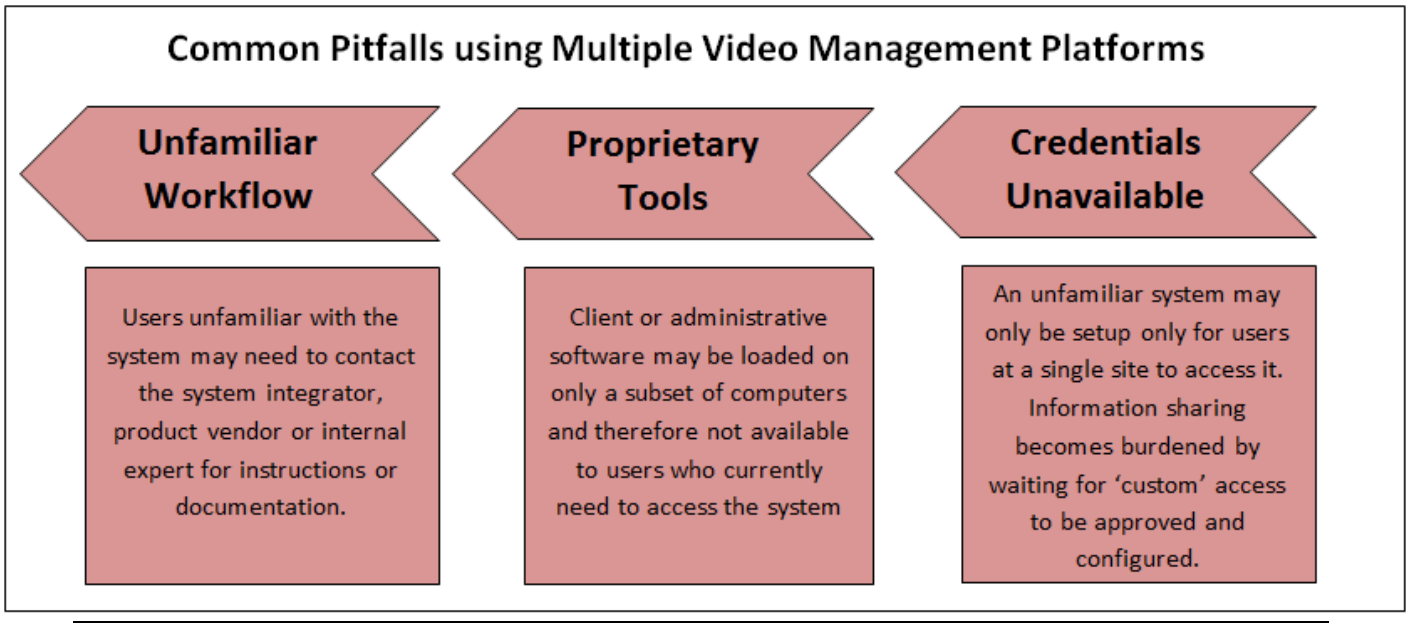
The benefits of standardizing on a single video recording platform are many but can be summarized as *increasing operational quality*.

This document examines the many benefits of standardizing technology from user training and expertise to vendor management and leveraging buying power.

From Generalists to Experts

Many departments of an organization interact with the video security technology. IT staff may be involved in managing the system. Loss prevention and security investigators use the visual evidence collected to ensure assets and people stay secure. 3rd party guard services may augment the direct employed staff and utilize live monitoring capabilities of the system. Systems integrators provide technology maintenance and support as well as liaise with security technology vendors.

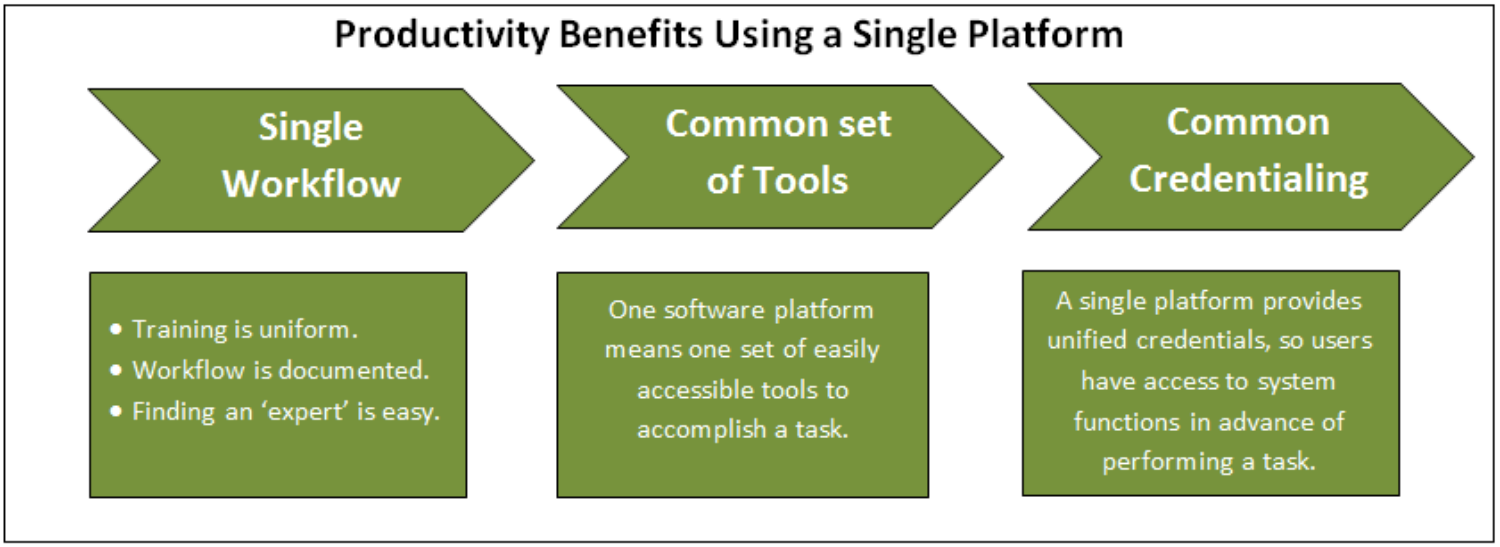
When an organization has multiple and different video management systems in place, developing organizational expertise necessary to most effectively utilize the security system becomes difficult at best.



It goes without saying having a uniform system will reduce complexity when dealing with the security technology. Technology staff will have a single set of tools and procedures for managing, upgrading and maintaining technology at all the organization's sites. Security and Loss Prevention staff will benefit from the ability to establish uniform investigations procedures and security event response procedures.

3rd party guard service can become productive more quickly via unified training which becomes practical to provide when a single platform is in place. Developing documented procedures and internal technology training can be unmanageable with a variety of different systems in place, all of which may be changing based on software updates and maintenance.

If Systems Integrators are employed for ongoing technology maintenance, finding an integrator proficient the exact mix of platforms deployed may be next to impossible. A higher degree of proficiency can be found when an organization focuses on a single platform by selecting an integrator with expertise and background in the platform of choice. Less time is spent finding the correct information and troubleshooting problems which means less time on site and a lower service cost can be realized.



Information Sharing

Disparate video security systems are too often incompatible. Short of providing every user with each of the software tools used across all existing platforms, getting people access to the information they need can be impossible without a unified video recording platform.

- Incompatible or proprietary exported video recordings require special software to view.

- Lack of platform features may cause investigators to miss key evidence.
- Client applications for viewing and investigations can connect to only one system at a time.

An example of the benefits realized from simplified information sharing can be found when using the video security system for purposes other than security. With many multi-site organizations, regional or centralized managers are often tasked with traveling between sites to visually verify quality of operations.

The video security system can provide visual information on elements of operational quality without the organization incurring the expense of sending someone onsite. Site cleanliness, proper staffing levels, promotional placement and more can be observed using existing cameras.

Figure 1: Visual verification of operational quality is made easy when video data is available from a unified platform.

As compared to having management travel to individual sites, using the video security system is compelling for reasons such as:

- Productivity gains due to reduced travel time.
- Reduction in costs associated to travel expenses.
- Ability to provide visual information at the executive level, and to others who may not normally have the opportunity to observe specific sites.
- Providing side-by-side comparisons of different sites.

A unified security system can bring together video, snapshot images and recordings of multiple sites in the same software client for easy report generation.

Vendor Management

Establishing a partnership with technology vendors can go a long way in making the product ownership experience a good one. Long term satisfaction with product deployments often comes down to service, support and knowledge.

Deploying a single product allows the organization to focus its attention and understanding thereby allowing users to achieve greater proficiency and get more from the array of features which commonly go unused due to lack of training or experience.

While the organization will have greater knowledge inherently of a single unified security platform, often the more import contributing factors to long term satisfaction are service and communication.

Increased buying power can, in many cases, enhance the service for the consumer and the communication level that both the consumer and vendor receive from each other.

Of course, all situations vary and different technology vendors provide different levels of service. It's not uncommon for large customers to get a variety of benefits and services directly from product manufacturers which can be realized by combining the organizations total purchasing power and concentrating on a single platform.

Frequently, large or strategic purchasers may gain access to:

- Priority support
- On-site installation commissioning from the product manufacturer
- Insight into the product roadmap
- Input in the development of the roadmap

Benefits of standardizing can further be realized when systems need service. Managing multiple DVR or VMS vendors becomes particularly challenging when dealing with warranty issues. Different warranty periods, different contact numbers and varying procedures can lead to slower repair and systems out of service. Often when using a standardized platform it becomes possible to obtain an accelerated warranty repair plan or work with a Systems integrator who specializes in the chosen platform and may stock replacement parts for fast onsite repairs.

Making the switch

If it's decided the correct direction for your organization is to make the switch from multiple disparate recording platforms to a single platform the challenge becomes justifying the necessary investment.

One of the most difficult barriers to overcome is often the objection that may have led to the problem of multiple systems currently in place, which is: “why replace equipment if it is still functioning”.

The good news is modern Video Management Software platforms by and large integrate with most commonly deployed camera technologies. The largest cost components of a video security system are the cameras and existing cabling. The component of the video security system which most greatly influences the user experience and how the organization benefits from the video is the ‘head end’ or video recording equipment.

To get the maximum gain at the lowest cost a strategy often employed is to switch out all the recording equipment to a single platform while continuing to use existing cameras and cabling infrastructure.

When considering compatibility with your existing cameras and infrastructure, modern video management products can fall into one of two categories; IP-only Video Management Software or Hybrid Video Management Software.

An IP-only VMS can connect to video feeds only over the IP network. This means if analog cameras are in place, the analog camera will need to be streamed over the network using an encoder. An encoder is effectively an IP camera, without the camera built in. The encoder has BNC ports to connect to the analog camera video signal which it then streams video over the network. The encoder converts the analog camera into an IP camera making it compatible with the IP-only VMS.

A hybrid capable VMS can take in video feeds from IP cameras but it can also directly connect to analog cameras using a video capture card. Although available hybrid VMS products are sold differently, typically the hybrid VMS cost-per-analog-camera is significantly lower than using a combination of encoders and IP-only VMS software. This is because when using an IP-only VMS, a software license for each analog camera is purchased and an encoder to connect the analog camera must also be purchased separately. Using a hybrid VMS the cost of the capture card is typically bundled with the software license or compatible hybrid VMS hardware, effectively eliminating the encoder cost.

	IP-only VMS	Hybrid VMS
Existing IP camera compatibility		
Compatible with existing IP cameras		
Existing analog camera compatibility		
Does not require a separate encoder purchase for analog cameras.		

	IP-only VMS	Hybrid VMS
Cost savings factors		
Includes encoding hardware for analog cameras.		
Delivery model		
Available as software-only. Use Commercial Off The Shelf server hardware.		
Available with purpose-built hardware for a complete single-vendor recording solution.		

For most deployments with a mix of camera technology the clear choice is to use a hybrid VMS platform.

Beyond camera compatibility, costs can be further reduced by researching vendors who offer some type of exchange program. It is common for VMS vendors to offer prospective customers a discount to 'trade out' their existing recording software and equipment. A specialized Systems Integrator can typically advise on available programs, discount levels and manage the appropriate paperwork.

Selecting the Platform

Making a commitment to a new VMS platform means the platform may be in place for some time. Evaluating existing platform features as well as understanding the future product direction is important. A successful transition can be achieved by making sure the new platform meets with your organization's existing security system user requirements and ensuring the platform will continually evolve in the future.

Because disparate systems with a myriad of different features are in place today, understanding the needs of existing security systems users is key to making the correct product selection.

Successful product selection commonly begins with surveying existing users. How do the users interact with the system they use today? What capabilities are missing from the systems they interact with currently? Important questions include:

- What workflow are the users accustom to?
- Do users view video only on alarm events or view video live?

- What access control systems are in place and do those require integration to the video platform?
- What investigation tools are commonly used? What tools are missing from current platforms?
- How are systems managed, configured and monitored currently?
- Is centralized system management and upgrading capabilities important to IT staff?

Because many different platforms are currently in place, the most desirable new platform will have a wide range of features including the following attributes:

- A variety of viewing capabilities, allowing users to view live video, view the security system using a mapping interface and view video on alarm events.
- Access to the security system from multiple client platforms, such as iPhone, iPad, Android, Web Browser and via Windows clients.
- Integration capability with many popular access control systems and other 3rd party security technology.
- Popular investigation and search tools.
- Nonproprietary export formats so users can share and view video without proprietary tools.
- Granular user permissions can ensure many users can have the benefit of access to the video security system without risk to the organization of users gaining the incorrect level of access.

Switching to a single platform also offers the opportunity to reduce effort and time spent servicing and maintaining the security technology.

- Centralized management and monitoring will help issues get addressed proactively ensuring maximum uptime.
- Centralized multi-system software upgrading help keep the system current with the investment of minimal time.
- Remote recording server configuration allows an administration expert to manage all systems centrally.
- Remote client configuration capability reduces IT help desk deployments to make configuration changes for users.
- Centralized client software updating means not only are the recording systems brought up to date with minimal time invested but users can access the latest features as they become available.

Summary

Evaluating a move from current security technology can be a daunting task. The benefits from such a move are many and include increased productivity, easier system management and often getting use from the system beyond security and loss prevention.

Using a platform to bring together existing camera technology can dramatically reduce project costs. Combined with the productivity related ROI, for many organizations standardizing the VMS is the best step forward for their security technology program.

ABOUT SALIENT SYSTEMS

Salient Systems offers network friendly, comprehensive IP and analog video surveillance management systems (VMS) built on open architecture. As the recognized transition leader from analog to digital video, Salient Systems' VMS, CompleteView™, is scalable and provides everything needed to manage a multi-server enterprise from a single desktop. Salient delivers simple and scalable security today…and tomorrow. For more information about Salient Systems and CompleteView, visit www.salientsys.com.

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