March Networks Systems Provide Security for Vice-Presidential Debate

Video Surveillance System at Washington University in St. Louis Performs Flawlessly

Tens of millions of Americans applauded vice-presidential candidates Joseph Biden and Sarah Palin following their historic debate at Washington University in St. Louis October 3rd, but behind the scenes, representatives of more than a dozen law enforcement agencies were relieved that there were no security breaches to mar the event.

Hunkered down in a Joint Operations Center on the sprawling campus, law enforcement personnel representing the St. Louis County Police, the University Police Department, the City of St. Louis Police, the Missouri Highway Patrol, the U.S. Secret Service and a number of other federal, state and local government agencies relied on the University's March Networks® video surveillance system to keep an eye on the auditorium, the designated public viewing areas and all the approaches to the site.

Overseeing the security of such a high profile event was nothing new for Washington University Police Chief Don Strom.

"Washington University has a history of staging debates going back to 1992," said Chief Strom. "I've done two presidential debates – the Bush-Gore debate in 2000 and the Bush-Kerry debate in 2004 – so I had a little bit of experience and knew how important it would be to have a high-quality video surveillance system in place."

The campus-wide, networked system gave Strom the flexibility to equip the Joint Operations Center with workstations, a series of 24-inch flat-screen monitors and one video projector to provide the command team with the visual overview they needed to assess and respond to any emergency. The University's video surveillance system required very few modifications other than the addition of a few pan-tilt-zoom cameras in strategic locations.

"One of the things I have learned is that it's important to have all of the decision-makers in the Joint Operations Center" said Strom. "But, at the same time, they also want to see what's going on everywhere else. The solution is to identify all of those key areas of interest and provide them with video feeds, so they don't have to go out in the field.

"If an officer outside reports an incident, security staff in the Operations Center can spin the PTZ camera and instantly provide the command team with a view of what's happening."

Fortunately, with the exception of some pushing and shoving between Obama and McCain supporters in the fenced-off public viewing areas, all of the drama took place on the stage inside the University's Athletic Complex.

"Everything went very smoothly," said Kendall Addison, Vice-President, Commercial Services, with PASS Security, the security systems integrator that supplied Washington University with its state-of-the-art March Networks system. "The security agency representatives who came in to inspect the setup a few days before the event were very, very impressed."

University administration had resisted a full-scale deployment of video surveillance at its main campus for several years, but "for a variety of reasons, that position evolved as a result of world events, as it has in many other places," noted Strom.

A team comprised of the Chief of Police and representatives of the University's IT and Facilities departments worked with a consultant to clarify their requirements and invited several system integrators to pitch their solutions. Ultimately, they selected PASS Security and the March Networks system it recommended.

Chief Strom notes several factors that contributed to the decision, among them scalability, centralized management and the opportunity to accommodate video analytics. The University's positive experience with a March Networks system and PASS Security at its Medical School campus also helped the team in its deliberations.

"We were looking for a platform that would allow for growth because we were starting out small," said Strom. "And it was a good thing, too, because the system has quickly expanded to many more cameras than was originally anticipated. We also wanted a system that would feed video to a central location, so we wouldn't have to run out to buildings across the campus to pull video if something happened."

Seventy March Networks NVRs currently record video from approximately 430 cameras located at strategic sites, including parking garages, entrances and exits at student residence halls and some of the University-owned off-campus apartment buildings. A CCTV committee oversees the placement of cameras and is responsible for ensuring compliance with the University's CCTV policy, which stipulates that video surveillance is for the safety and security of students and faculty and the protection of property.

In one memorable incident, University police used archived video to identify a thief who walked out of a residence hall with five laptops. By coincidence, recalled Chief Strom, a female student called police to report an encounter with an intruder who tailgated her into another residence hall the same day. Police reviewed the video and discovered it was the same person. Tracking down the suspect was easy because he had flirted with the female student and given her his cellphone number. A call was made, a date was set and, "unfortunately for him," said Chief Strom, "we were there when he showed up." All of the stolen property was recovered and returned within a matter of hours.

Bob Wethington, the University's Manager of Access Control and Electronic Security, is particularly impressed with the March Networks motion histogram, a graphical display of motion in a camera view over a user-defined timeframe.

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"If you have a 14-hour period you're investigating to see who spray painted a window, the spikes in the motion histogram will alert you right away to someone standing in front of that camera. With other systems, it could take hours to drill down and find the video evidence you're looking for.

"The March Networks system," added Wethington, "is extremely reliable, user-friendly and easily networked."

The video surveillance system is managed from the police department's communications center, where dispatchers are able to review video of reported incidents. Four, 48-inch monitors display live feeds from selected cameras, but the system is primarily used to investigate incidents after the fact.

Having worked with earlier generation video surveillance technology over his career, Chief Strom is impressed with March Networks' Investigator and Evidence Manager software. "Those of us who have been exposed to CCTV over the years and know the drudgery involved in going through videotape appreciate the convenience of a system that allows us to see where activity is occurring and focus our efforts on very narrow parts of the video spectrum," he said.

Chief Strom now looks forward to taking advantage of the system's video analytics capability to further enhance the police department's effectiveness. With video analytics software triggering alerts and automatically mounting live video on a communications center monitor, dispatchers will be able to send officers to investigate a potential threat immediately instead of waiting to hear about an incident long after it had occurred. ✹

Sarah Palin debates Joseph Biden

PASS Security

PASS Security (**www.passsecurity.com**) has provided security systems and peace of mind to thousands of businesses and homes across the St. Louis metropolitan area since 1969. Over the years, the company has grown from a burglar alarm company into a leading security systems integrator specializing in intrusion detection, video surveillance, CCTV, access control and related system monitoring at its central monitoring facility.

Washington University in St. Louis

Washington University in St. Louis (**www.wustl.edu**) is a non-sectarian, private research university located in Greater St. Louis, Missouri. Founded in 1853 and named for George Washington, the university has an enrolment of 13,000 students from all 50 U.S. states and more than 125 countries. The undergraduate program is ranked 12th overall by the U.S. News & World Report National Universities ranking. Its School of Medicine is currently ranked 3rd in the nation and the George Warren Brown School of Social Work is ranked 1st. Washington University is well known for hosting United States Presidential and Vice-Presidential debates, having been selected to host debates in every United States Presidential election since 1992.