

LAW ENFORCEMENT APPLICATIONS A Milestone Blueprint Article

Police Interview Rooms

Nobody likes paperwork, especially busy detectives who would rather be out solving cases than stuck in an office transcribing their notes from an important interview. WatchPoint Video has created an automated Police Interview Room solution that produces legally acceptable evidence in electronic form.



Video surveillance equipment is already widely used by many jurisdictions to capture police interviews, but the results are not always satisfactory. In order to be effective, a system has to be high quality, easy to use and highly reliable. Audio quality is the most important consideration: the court must be able to hear every word that was said, from a whisper to a roar.

Informed consent is required by most states when recording audio. A numeric keypad is used to activate the system once you get the subjects' permission. A status LED goes from red to green at the start of recording. Enter the same code a second time and the recording is over. The LED goes back to red, and no disk space is used.

There are two other modes worth mentioning: Snooping allows officers outside of the room to watch the interview in real-time from their desks, whether or not it is being recorded. Privacy mode disables the camera and audio streams unless the keypad is activated.

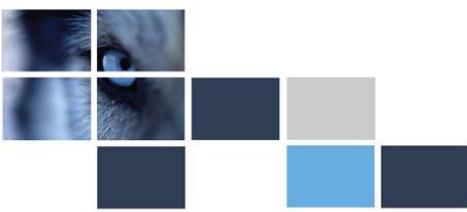
Ease of use is dependent on having a simple routine that detectives can follow with a minimum of steps. A video management system based on the Milestone XProtect software is used to create, retrieve, and archive the interviews. Most officers who are familiar with basic computer use learn the system in about 10 minutes and enjoy using it.

Evidence management requires a clear chain of custody, irrefutable authenticity, long shelf-life, and low cost. A DVD writer is included with the server, but evidence can be created at any workstation or laptop connected to the LAN. Evidence disks created by the system can be played by any modern PC, but cannot be modified by image editing tools.

About WatchPoint Video:

WatchPoint Video LLC is a Milestone Certified Partner and System Integrator serving the Pacific Northwest. Based in Portland Oregon, the founder and author of this article is Roger Finger, a former Applications Manager at Intel Corporation for 21 years. WatchPoint Video specializes in IP based video surveillance solutions for government, industrial and commercial customers. Contact sales@WatchPointVideo.com to find innovative solutions for your challenging video surveillance requirements.





Working with Video

During the interview:

Get permission from the subject for audio recording then enable the keypad before starting the interview. Normally there is a desk or table between the interviewer and interviewee. The microphone will be in that general area of the room and can hear everything that you can (and then some...). Complete the interview and disable the keypad.

After the interview:

Return to your desk and open the Milestone Smart Client application. Bring up the appropriate date and time then review the video. Export it to a DVD and label it with the case number associated with the interview. Some jurisdictions hand this DVD to an evidence technician for safe keeping.

Managing evidence:

Interviews are retained on the system for viewing many months after they occur. The actual retention period depends on how much disk storage is supplied with the system. A Storage Area Network can be used to automate archival and interface to evidence retention systems.

Camera Selection

Wall or ceiling mounted vandal resistant mini-domes are the best choice. A wide angle lens will help capture more of the room, but will also introduce a bending effect. A megapixel camera with digital Pan Tilt Zoom can be used to allow flexibility in placement of the desk and chairs.



The Software Ties it All Together

Milestone's XProtect software is the foundation of this system. Enterprise level applications like video management require rock solid reliability and performance. Milestone delivers with a robust feature set and industry leading ease-of-use. As a System Integrator, WatchPoint Video uses Milestone software to program in the feature set required to perform the above actions.

One final word about reliability: In most video surveillance applications, 99.9% of the data is garbage. Only one specific event really matters, and you throw away the remainder after a suitable retention period (usually two weeks).

With police interviews 100% of the data must be retained. For capital offenses these interviews are likely to be stored for years. Milestone facilitates the archival and distribution of video, but only good evidence protocol can guarantee that the data is permanently archived.