



PAY UP OR ELSE!

Mexico City Police Use Recording Technology to Manage Towing Operations

To keep the traffic flowing in Mexico City, the second largest city in the world (population of approximately 20 million), the capital district's Department of Public Security oversees a fleet of tow trucks that collectively hauls away 325,000 illegally parked cars from city streets every year.

However, rather than pay the fine, motorists alerted to the impending removal of their vehicle are often tempted to open their wallets and offer the tow truck operator a cash incentive to drive away and forget the whole thing. Concerned that it was losing the battle against illegal parking and also losing revenue from fines, the department turned to Mexico City security systems integrator TMM to come up with a solution.

The result is probably one of the most imaginative applications of digital video surveillance anywhere in the world.

March Networks® Mobile Digital Video Recorders (MDVRs) installed on Mexico City tow trucks are integrated with the claw on the lifting arm. Once the claw is hooked to the illegally parked vehicle, it's locked in place until the owner of the vehicle pays the fine by credit card or the vehicle is towed to the car pound.

Software supporting the application was written using March Networks' Software Development Kit.

Officers located at the department's central monitoring station are able to view video from a rear-facing camera on each tow truck over a CDMA cellular network and

remotely command the recording device to release a vehicle when a credit card payment is processed.

The department is currently about a third of the way through the deployment and has 175 tow trucks equipped with recorders. Once the project is complete, the entire fleet of 500 tow trucks will be equipped with March Networks MDVRs.

Finding a recording device for the innovative application was the first challenge. The system integrator, TMM, required a ruggedized recorder that would be able to stand up to the daily wear and tear of a mobile environment. The solution required centralized system management capability to efficiently administer such a large deployment and had to accommodate the transmission of video over a cellular network in real time to a central monitoring station.

"We conducted market research and weren't able to find any other systems designed for a mobile environment that included system management like March Networks Enterprise Service Manager (ESM)," said Claudia Ramos, New Projects Manager, TMM Logistics.

Using the ESM, the department is able to remotely configure the recorders, monitor their performance and schedule software updates.

Aside from having better control of its towing operations and reducing revenue losses, the department is able to use video evidence from the recorders to resolve customer complaints and defend itself against false liability claims.

Live video transmitted and monitored by the department is also useful if an irate motorist presents a threat to the tow truck operators and police backup is required.

Continuous video is stored on the MDVRs, but when the lifting device on a tow truck is engaged, the video is downloaded through the cellular network to a central server.

Since it began rolling out the solution, towing revenues have increased 1400 per cent. "We are very pleased with the system," said Ramos. "It has made a big difference. We have much better control over the towing operations, and the increased revenue will more than cover the investment made to acquire the technology.

"Knowing that they cannot avoid paying a fine, motorists may also be less likely to park their cars illegally, and that will help to ease congestion in the city."*

Department of Public Security (Secretaria de Seguridad Publica)

The Department of Public Security (www.ssp.gob.mx) is an agency of Mexico's federal government responsible for policing and security in Mexico's Capital District. The department is mandated to keep the peace, preserve freedom, protect the civil rights of citizens and fight crime.

Photos by Ernesto Ramirez, courtesy of El Centro