

School District Blazes Path to All-IP Future



Sixty Sites Equipped with Various Flavors of March Networks Video Surveillance Technology

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— Brian Johnson
Network Systems Analyst,
Escambia County School District



NETWORK systems analyst Brian Johnson and his colleagues in the IT department at the Escambia County School District in Pensacola, Florida, didn’t need a crystal ball to know that video surveillance was transitioning to an all-IP world when they began their search for a standardized, district-wide solution four years ago.

“We hit the street with an RFI to see what was out there, although at the time, we knew we wanted a hybrid solution,” recalled Johnson. “IP was just getting started and it was still over and above what we thought we could afford, but we wanted the capability to transition to all-IP sometime down the road.”

Of the four vendor offerings evaluated, the March Networks® solution proposed by Pensacola-based Advanced Control Concepts offered the clearest and best thought-out migration path to an all-IP future.

“We subjected the two top systems to a bake-off and a trial in a high-risk facility, and March Networks won hands down,” said Johnson.

The first dozen or so schools were equipped with March Networks 4000 C Series NVRs and analog cameras, but as the March Networks product portfolio evolved, Escambia County School District began acquiring the company’s server-based Video Management Software (VMS) solution and the new web-based March Networks Command™ IP video management platform.

Approximately half of the school district’s 60 sites are now equipped with various flavors of March Networks video surveillance technology, “but eventually we’re looking at getting all of their systems upgraded to the Command infrastructure,” said Advanced Control Concepts’ Jeff Taylor.

Ease of deployment was the primary reason for Escambia County School District’s interest in the Command platform because the web-based application gets around the problem of providing the school district’s Macintosh users with access to video.

“In the absence of a PC,” said Johnson, “we had to either load Windows on a Mac or provide a Windows box. But even with our Windows installed base, not having to install a client and maintain it is huge.”

Tying local law enforcement into the March Networks video surveillance systems will also be easier in a Command environment.

“With Command in place, law enforcement will be able to pull up in front of a school in an emergency situation, tap into the system and access live video from every hallway,” said Johnson. “Command is going to be a big help in doing that because if you tell multiple law enforcement agencies that they have to load a client on every police cruiser laptop, they start pushing back pretty quickly.”

The March Networks migration path to an all-IP platform figured prominently in the school district’s procurement decision in 2007, but also weighing heavily in the decision was ease of use.

Escambia County School District doesn’t have a central monitoring facility equipped with

video walls and dedicated security staff, explained Johnson. The primary users of the system are the school principals, assistant principals and resource officers in the individual schools, most of whom lack the time or expertise required to master a complex user interface. The March Networks system appealed to them because it was easy to use.

Reliability was another important requirement, given the challenges the school district had to contend with prior to 2007, when procuring video surveillance systems was the responsibility of individual schools.

“In the past, schools were responsible for providing their own video surveillance, so if they wanted something, they had to go out and buy it,” said Johnson. “There was no standardization. They bought whatever they wanted and they paid for it out of school funds.”

The resulting hodgepodge of equipment wasn’t always of the highest quality, didn’t always capture video when necessary and cost too much to support.

As the schools transitioned to networked solutions, IT entered the picture and quickly came to the conclusion that one high-quality, district-wide solution was the way to go.

The school district hires Schmidt Consulting Group of Pensacola for system design and works closely with school principals and resource officers to decide on camera placement. Typically, cameras are positioned to cover entrances and exits, hallways, cafeterias, gymnasiums, media centers, bus ramps and parking lots. Principals, assistant principals and resource officers are equipped with 42-inch monitors offering live views of selective high-risk sites and a map of the school showing all of the camera locations.

In the event of an altercation or other incident, a school principal or resource officer will search the archives for the video evidence, summon the offending students to their office and play the clip for all to see, bringing most matters to a speedy resolution.

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The staged rollout of March Networks technology began with the high schools and middle schools, and will cover all of the school district’s 60 sites over the next few years.

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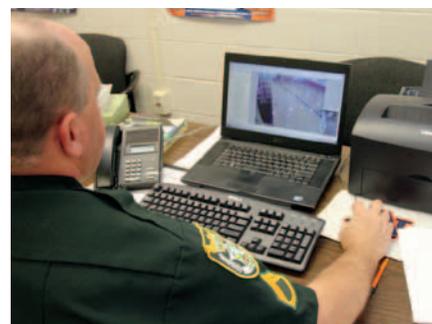
Escambia County School District

Escambia County School District (www.escambia.k12.fl.us) serves the education needs of Escambia County, the westernmost county in the State of Florida. The school district boasts an enrolment of approximately 40,000 students and operates 31 elementary schools, nine middle schools and seven high schools, as well as a number of specialized education programs in an area stretching from the Gulf of Mexico north to the Alabama border.



Advanced Control Concepts

Advanced Control Concepts, Inc., (www.acc.us.com) is a March Networks Certified Solution Provider based in Pensacola, Florida, offering a wide range of security systems, from access control and video surveillance to fire alarms for commercial, institutional, military and government facilities.



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