



Closed Circuit Television's key role in modern policing

- A unique insight by DCI Mick Neville, of London's Metropolitan Police Service -

Over the years, much has been written about the deployment of CCTV as a high tech. Crime Reduction tool, and yet many experienced practitioners feel that it's effectiveness in this role, has for a variety of reasons, long been overstated.

One man who knows more than most about the operational challenges of making CCTV work, is Detective Chief Inspector Mick Neville, of London's Metropolitan Police Service, specialist VIIDO unit – (pronounced like "Fido").

Here he explains in some detail the work of his officers, and describes the challenges and frustrations involved in locating and extracting key usable CCTV material, and presenting it as evidentially admissible recordings.

D.J. First off Mick, can I thank you for taking the time to provide your unique insight into the workings of CCTV at the sharp end. For the benefit of the readers, can I just ask you to very briefly explain a little bit of background about your specialist Visual Images Identification and Detections Office (VIIDO) unit.

M.N. The first VIIDO was set up at Southwark Police Station in September 2006, followed a few months later by Lambeth. There are now eleven offices right across London; even The Bill's fictional "Sun Hill" station has it's own VIIDO unit - it was mentioned in one of the TV episodes! I am convinced that we will have a VIIDO in all 32 London boroughs within 2 years. Other forces (both UK & International) are using my systems as well. I have even been invited to assist the Royal Bahamas Police!

D.J. In terms of operational procedures, how do VIIDO officers go about obtaining CCTV product that is required for evidential use?

M.N. Viewing is conducted on site and it is very unusual that it is required to go to the Video Lab. We do some basic training, but staff learn "on the job" and standards are high.

A DVD "story disc" is prepared of every incident, with still images of suspects sent to the Met Circulation Unit (MetCU) for identification.

The statement from the CCTV provider & viewing log (the written record of what is shown on the images) are retained in VIIDO and will be passed to the investigating officer once an identification is made. A statement from the person identifying the suspect is then added to the file. Without these vital documents, the CCTV may be inadmissible in court.



"Vast amounts of money have been spent on CCTV, which often has little, if any impact, on volume crime -"

D.J. When your officers have established that there is a suspect on a particular recording, what needs to happen to ensure that the images are correctly audited within the police service, and therefore are considered reliable for the purposes of Forensic Surveillance.

M.N. Once identified the suspect's image is compared against the image held by the police on the "mug shot" database. A report showing these images together and intelligence on the subject (for example, where he lives, previous convictions, intelligence on his offending etc.) is prepared. This is known as the "ident docket". It is based on a fingerprint identification report and like that document, it is sent to the senior detective on the police area (DCI) and recorded on the Crime Report to ensure it is supervised and actioned.



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D.J. Setting aside some of the more optimistic aspirations for using Closed Circuit Television, do you think that as an industry, we should be content with what's been achieved so far?

M.N. The public have a high expectation of CCTV and are frequently told that they are captured on camera three hundred times per day. Improved CCTV investigation can significantly assist the public confidence target recently set by the Home Secretary. Vast amounts of money have been spent on CCTV, which often has little, if any impact, on volume crime - robbery, burglary and assaults, unless my systems are followed.



D.J. I understand that the VIIDO offices are an integral part of the Met. Police's Operation Javelin; what are the objectives for this Operation?

M.N. To improve the use of CCTV & other images to catch criminals, and with the recent change in the Home Office police target (60% of the public to have confidence in the police), to show that police are making the very best use of CCTV.

D.J. So how would you relate the advantages of VIIDO experienced officers dealing with CCTV product, rather than the previous approach?

M.N. Evidence from London's Metropolitan Police Operation Javelin Project Team and Operation Emerald (which aims to improve the passage of cases through the Criminal Justice System) show that relying on front line officers to gather CCTV is much less effective than the retrieval of CCTV by dedicated units. Over 80% of footage is now digital, making it far more complex to obtain than simply removing a VHS tape. In the past, the provision of technology has been seen as the solution to poor use of CCTV.

In my opinion, to make CCTV work post-incident, it requires the following ten steps:

1 - A Dedicated Team – a Visual Images Identification & Detections Office (VIIDO) requires less than 1% of the staff employed on a local police municipal area; there must be a supervisor and good quality staff. A small amount of technical ability is required, but the desire to find evidence is the most important qualification. Basic equipment is required, so that the staff can play footage quickly and convert it into a DVD format, which will enable it to be played on laptops in the police interview room, and in court rooms. The unit requires a vehicle to visit crime scenes, and secure air-conditioned accommodation as all the evidence (discs, tapes, statements & viewing logs) are retained in the office, ready for when the offender is identified.



The unit has a number of specific roles:

- Gathering CCTV for serious crimes (robbery, rape, serious assault, burglary etc.) – taking this role away from normal front line officers.
- Providing a local "Video Lab" where officers are handed CCTV (for example with cases of shoplifting).
- Acting as a single point of contact for major CCTV providers (e.g., bus garages).

There are numerous other benefits:

- The quality of investigation is improved and investigators' time is saved as CCTV matters are dealt with by the VIIDO.
- Local CCTV assistance is provided with no requirement to travel to a central Video Lab, unless the footage is complex.
- Time can be saved obtaining guilty pleas using CCTV evidence early on in the interview.
- Valuable assistance for Counter Terrorism, major investigations & serious incidents (e.g high risk missing persons).
- Up to date knowledge of cameras & retention period of footage.



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2 - Performance culture and end-to-end tracking - just as fingerprints and DNA submissions can be compared and tracked. Units must be judged against each other and senior officers must be held to account for their performance.

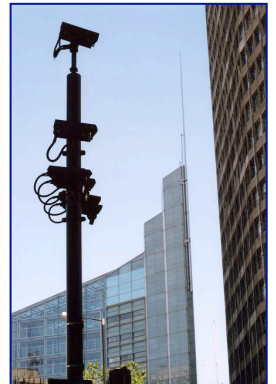
3 - Partnership with all CCTV providers - the police do not own cameras. We must make sure that providers of footage are given feedback and thanks for their efforts. This improves relationships and increases the amount of footage provided.

4 - Systematic identification process - it is no good allowing individual officers to circulate images as they see fit. Often these are shown only to other local officers, yet criminals travel, across cities, across counties and frequently across countries. The development of the Metropolitan Police Image Circulation Unit (MetCU) has resulted in all images being circulated in a structured format, giving each one the same opportunity of identification.

D.J. Is there a set protocol for the way in which suspects images are handled by the force?

M.N. Yes, the phases are as follows:

- 1st – To police officers, police informants & partners of police (e.g. the local authority CCTV control rooms) with images displayed in a journal "Caught on Camera", available on the police internal intranet site.
- 2nd – On posters displayed in public areas, but also in police stations where criminals can easily see them – perhaps in the fingerprint room and cells. This tells criminals that CCTV has a consequence. It also encourages them to identify themselves or other criminals.
- 3rd – National circulation – in the UK, the Police Gazette is seen by prison officers, who make many identifications. Images are also released to the media, in local newspapers, on the police external internet site, on CrimeStoppers and on the television (for example, programmes such as the BBC's monthly CrimeWatch).



D.J. What are the other five key points that you'd consider as "best practice" by your VIIDO officers?

5 - Strong supervision of dockets - the management of identification reports must be the responsibility of the Crime Manager, who needs to scrutinise action, particularly if arrests are not made. A senior officer is required to "champion" this performance.

6 - Police Officers trained to use CCTV evidence - there must be training developed to ensure the potential of the evidence is maximised in the interview and at court. Over 70% of offenders plead guilty when identified by VIIDO offering considerable savings on expensive trials. If they do decide to plead "not guilty", then academic research shows that if CCTV is played in court, the criminal will receive a longer sentence.

7 - Communication Strategy - the public must see that CCTV is not a "Big Brother", targeting and checking on their everyday private movements.

Release of CCTV images into the public domain is vital, for the following reasons:

- To give the public confidence that CCTV is being used to target criminals.
- To make criminals see that being caught on CCTV has a consequence – this will make them avoid areas and stop committing crime. We recently had a criminal hand himself in to the police station, after an image of him had been placed on the CrimeStoppers website, and he had seen it!
- To identify offenders.
- To obtain additional evidence – several offenders have been found in possession of their own cut-out CCTV images, from newspapers.
- To best utilise the £500 million spent by the British Government (Surveillance Society Report 2008) and the unknown £billions spent by private industry on CCTV.



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8 - Liaison with lawyers

- There is currently no national policy for lawyers on the use of CCTV, unlike fingerprints and DNA. Cases will fail at court unless lawyers clearly understand about the use of evidential images.

9 - Courts able to play footage

- again this means that cases can be heard quickly. If CCTV cannot be played, we are in danger of losing witnesses, who will not attend on subsequent hearings.

10 - Technology fit for purpose

- we must keep up with facial recognition, logo recognition, video analytics etc. BUT we must not fall into the trap of thinking that technology is the whole solution. Trained people are far more important. In the past, too much money has been spent on technology and there was a belief that CCTV would prevent crime, simply by being fixed to a wall. Criminals soon realise that little action is taken if they commit crime in a CCTV area. Hence, CCTV must detect crime to prevent crime. Offenders must know that either they or their associates have been arrested and imprisoned as a result of being caught on camera.

The use of CCTV as evidence must become the Third Forensic Discipline.

D.J. I found this last point particularly interesting Mick, as I've long been advocating the technique of what I'd describe as "Deterrence through Detection" or DtD, which is obviously something that appears to be borne out by your experiences.

If I may, in conclusion I'd like to just quickly ask you three final brief questions ... firstly, given your practical experience at the sharp end, if there was one thing that you could do, or one key issue that you could identify to improve the quality of CCTV recordings currently being recovered, what would it be ...?



M.N. If purchasers of CCTV want it to catch criminals, then they must ensure ...

1. The compression rate is such that the system captures good images (showing a recognisable face and any distinctive clothing) and can retain these for at least 7 days without over-writing.
2. There is good lighting at all times of the day & night.
3. The camera angle captures the face straight on – not the top of the head.
4. The police can easily download images from the system.



D.J. Well Mick, I'm guessing that probably counts as perhaps four key recommendations, with each being equally as valid as the others.

Now if you could make just one comment directly to either the CCTV / IP Video manufacturers, or indeed the system installers, what would you like to say to them?

M.N. Technology is NOT the complete solution to CCTV issues.

D.J. And finally, given your experiences, if you were to offer just one single piece of key CCTV advice to any of your Law Enforcement colleagues around the globe, what would it be ...?



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M.N. Trained people are more important than technology; you must have an end-to-end system to ensure the captured image becomes a captured offender. The Met Police currently leads the world in this area, and if any colleagues would like further information, please feel free to contact me for any advice - e-mail:- [Mick.neville\[at\]met.police.uk](mailto:Mick.neville[at]met.police.uk)

If I could add one other point, the public have rightly become concerned about the "Surveillance Society", with CCTV cameras springing up everywhere. People will lose confidence in CCTV if it continues to be used to catch more motorists than violent offenders, or it is used to catch people dropping litter or putting rubbish in the wrong bin rather than bringing robbers to justice.

We must ensure it is used to target criminals.

D.J. Some excellent points very well made; many thanks indeed Mick for taking the time and trouble to provide your valuable insights, into how you see the future for CCTV within a modern policing environment It's very much appreciated!



If you wish to comment on this article, or if you have any suggestions for future interviews or CCTV related news stories that you'd like to share, why not drop a line to Doktor Jon ...

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