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STRATEGIC INSIGHT FOR TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATORS

Security Scores

The city hosting this year's game turns to GTSI

At Super Bowl

BY CRISTINA McEACHERN

While Super Bowl XXXVIII will be forever remembered for Janet Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction," the cameras at next month's game will have plenty of other things to monitor as the city of Jacksonville, Fla., with the help of GTSI, rolls out a video-surveillance system designed to enhance security in and around Alltel Stadium.

Truth be told, even before the NFL championship was pegged for Jacksonville, the stadium had put out an RFP for a surveillance system, but the project never took off. The city's sheriff's office also had been looking for a security system to "expand their capabilities," says Dave Lauer, the city's CIO. He didn't want to go as far as

I Rely on GTSI

JACKSONVILLE CIO
Lauer wanted a system that could be useful beyond the Super Bowl.

Tampa, Fla., had in 2001, when the city experimented with—and decided against— a facial-recognition system before hosting Super Bowl XXXV. Instead, Lauer wanted something that was less invasive, yet would prove scalable.

"The [video-surveillance] system was designed for the Super Bowl, but we were looking long-term for a system that would grow with us," Lauer says. "We were concerned with the crowds at the stadium and downtown areas surrounding it. Say something happens, a medical situation. We could direct resources to that area as well as monitor for security problems. It gives us more visibility in key areas of the city."

Going For the Pass

With less than a year to go before the big game, Jacksonville was under a tight time line for the video-surveillance project. The sheriff's office spoke with roughly a dozen different solution providers and enlisted the help of research firm Gartner to get a grasp on the key requirements and options for this type of security system.

The city narrowed the field down to six players, then each solution provider came in and made a presentation. "We were impressed with GTSI's experience on the security side, and their partners' previous work with the Pentagon," Lauer says.

In addition, Chantilly, Va.-based GTSI gained an edge on the competition by bringing in some of the partners it would tap for certain areas of the project. The field was then narrowed down to three. "Every provider we spoke to had their strengths and weaknesses," Lauer explains. "But GTSI brought together experts in all areas that were important for this project."

More specifically, GTSI turned to its InteGuard Alliance, which comprises more than 25 partners across the security spectrum for comprehensive solutions. One of those partners, Arlington, Va.-based DMJM Technology, had done work in several NFL stadiums, providing various video projects, and had even worked with the Pentagon, according to Arpad Toth, senior technologist at GTSI and chairman of the InteGuard Alliance.

"I liked the fact that they did a threat assessment—[they looked] at our needs and where the major threats were and prioritized those threats," Lauer adds.

Although the fine details of the system, budgeted at $1.75 million for the initial phases, are confidential, Lauer says approximately 100 cameras have been deployed throughout the stadium and parts of the city. Some of them are wired into an existing fiber-optic network, while other cameras are wirelessly connected. The system also includes a hardware component and services, but Lauer says he was "agnostic when it came to hardware and software."

As part of the project, GTSI is providing an encrypted VPN to stream the video. "The level of encryption is basically unbreakable," Lauer says. The cameras, connected via the secure network to several monitoring stations, can be controlled with pan, tilt and zoom actions for on-screen viewing, he adds.

The system is also scalable to expand as needed. "We see this going beyond the Super Bowl for other needs, such as a traffic system to monitor intersections and roadways," Lauer says. "Or for safety reasons in the back of rescue vehicles to monitor patients on the way to the hospital."

In fact, scalability was one of the key reasons GTSI's system was ultimately selected, says Jim Katz, manager of technology administration for the city of Jacksonville. "One of our main selection criteria was to see lasting benefits for the city for decades to come," he says.

When working with solution providers, Lauer says he most values communication, trust and honesty, and that partners become his "eyes and ears," keeping him apprised of technology advancements he should consider.

"We want to make sure whomever we work with has the city's best interests in mind," he says. "If things break down or we run into issues, trust and communication can work wonders at resolving them."

GTSI's Toth says he has visited the Jacksonville site, but that he won't be at the game. Instead, he will have a team of people there to ensure everything goes smoothly. "It is a much higher priority to provide safety and security to everyone there than to be in a VIP suite," he says. ■

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