Genetec™

The Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council

Chicago retail district ramps up security with Community Connect

Industry
Public safety

Location
Chicago, United States

Products
Community Connect, Stratocast

Back of the Yards partners with local businesses to expand camera coverage using Genetec Stratocast

The Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC) is a non-profit organization serving a large area of Chicago's Southwest Side in the United States. The BYNC offers social and economic programs to help improve their communities and surrounding areas. They also manage numerous Special Service Areas (SSAs) which use a local tax levy to fund additional services and programs. For example, one of the services provided within SSA #10, the 47th, and Ashland retail district, is enhanced security.

Searching for a more effective and affordable solution

As a bustling retail district, SSA #10 has seen its share of vandalism, theft, and other delinquencies. To keep residents and businesses safe, the BYNC began focusing its efforts on improving community security.

At first, the BYNC hired a security firm to patrol the neighborhood. While guards kept watchful eyes on the community, costs for the services stretched the SSA's budget. It was also a challenge to know for certain if the guards were patrolling as needed and if it was effectively reducing crime.

The BYNC went in search of a more affordable solution that would offer them better visibility and results. In the process, they met with their police commander, aldermen, and seven commissioners who oversee the scope of services and the budget for the SSAs. Together, they decided that adding video surveillance cameras around the community would be the best solution.

Campaigning to get the community involved

During their search for the right video management solution provider, Genetec stood out. The Stratocast cloud-based video monitoring solution was not only affordable and easy to deploy; but since the Chicago's Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC) was also using the Genetec Security Center unified platform, the BYNC would be able to connect all cameras in SSA #10 back to the city's unified command center. This would help speed up emergency response and investigations.

One more aspect solidified the BYNC's decision to choose Genetec—Community Connect. It's a Genetec framework that facilitates public-private collaboration to improve urban safety. With the help of their integrator, Procom, and the team at Genetec, SSA #10 began a campaign to get local businesses involved. SSA #10 offered to subsidize one Axis Communications video camera along with the cost of installation for the Stratocast cloud surveillance system, to all participating

businesses. The owners would then be responsible for paying the $15 monthly subscription fee.

"We knew that the key to delivering an effective and reliable program was to ensure that business owners would have no hassle once the camera was set up. And we wanted to connect our system to the OEMC. When we spoke to other video providers, they either couldn't provide that OEMC link or said that it would require another complicated and costly solution. Genetec Stratocast helped us fulfill our goals in providing a smooth and successful surveillance program for our community," said Fabiola Flores, Back of the Yards SSA#10 Program Manager and Business Development Coordinator.

Streamlining deployment in the cloud

While the program is still in its early stages, the BYNC currently has over 10 businesses onboard in SSA #10. As time ticks on and news of the project spreads throughout the community, the BYNC is confident that more businesses will sign up.

When a business owner in SSA #10 decides to participate, the team at Procom meets with shop owners for an initial consultation. On the next visit, Procom handles the installation. The team also trains business owners on how to use the Stratocast mobile app to easily check their video footage from anywhere. Typically, Procom can get everything installed and set up within four hours.

"All cameras are external, and Procom does an excellent job of making sure we get the most coverage possible of public areas. Business owners are very satisfied with the service they have received too. In fact, as soon as one business gets their camera up, we usually receive calls from neighboring business owners inquiring how they can get one too," explained Flores.

Each participating business also gets a sticker decal which they can affix to the storefront, which reads 'This business is being monitored by Back of the Yards Community Connect security initiative'. This lets visitors know— cameras are watching.

Collaborating with the Chicago OEMC

To date, the cameras have been doing their job and deterring crime. "According to the 9th District Chicago Police Department, there were fewer thefts in our retail district last year," said Flores.

As the program expands to include more businesses, it continues to deliver results. Thankfully, there have been no major incidents reported this year. So, while Chicago's Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC) operators have the ability to pull up video feeds from community cameras during emergencies, they haven't had the need to.

This capability is enabled by the Federation™ feature, which gives an organization access to manage multiple independent Genetec systems as one. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the business owner and the Chicago OEMC, so that each parties' responsibilities are clear.

Keeping an eye on the community

At the SSA #10 office, another federated connection gives the team access to the cameras via the Security Center SaaS edition. They have a small monitoring station setup which allows various team members to occasionally check in on maintenance tasks. This includes verifying if sidewalks were properly de-iced, debris was cleared from roadways, and fallen branches were collected.

When a security incident is reported by a business owner, the SSA team will also quickly pull up archives to see if they can spot anything. They conduct preliminary investigations before getting law enforcement involved and then file police reports with all the available evidence.

"The Security Center platform has been very easy to use. We can quickly backtrack and locate the very minute and second we need when searching for footage. For instance, we've had a lot of issues with graffiti, so we have been able to retrieve video which identifies two main culprits," explained Flores.

During an annual community festival where over 200,000 people flood the streets of SSA #10, the surveillance system adds even more value. The SSA team actively monitors live video feeds to ensure that everything is going smoothly and that spectators are safe.

Privacy concerns haven't been an issue either. According to Flores, "People want a safer community and they know we're only monitoring public areas, so they are supporting this initiative. The more eyes on the street, the better."

Setting sights on future objectives

Looking ahead, SSA #10 has big goals. They want to have a total of 200 businesses involved in the Community Connect program within the next two years. In the meantime, they're very happy with their decision to work with Procom and Genetec to launch this collaborative security program.

"Community Connect in the Back of Yards Neighborhood is a holistic initiative. The surveillance system doesn't just benefit the businesses, but the entire community. The fact that it's connected to the Chicago OEMC allows for faster response during any critical emergencies and people feel safer shopping in our retail area. Community Connect is really adding more value and security to our neighborhood, and that has been our goal from the start," concluded Flores.

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