



WATCHING BRIEF

Steven Jussaume explains how body-worn cameras are being employed to efficiently address the challenges of correctional facilities

Since the mid-2010s, there have been numerous studies, pilots and deployments of body-worn cameras (BWCs) in various industry segments. Law enforcement has been at the forefront of these. In being one of the primary users of such cameras, law-enforcement agencies (LEAs) have been trying to determine the effectiveness of BWCs and, if proven effective, what are the best policies and procedures to ensure they have the most successful programme in place. To accomplish this, it is essential that the technology chosen meets the needs of the user.

These studies have had varying responses to the benefits of body-worn cameras, but the majority highlight not only the significant value to law enforcement, but also to the people the departments LEA's interact with.

One specific segment of law-enforcement officer that has distinctly different needs to traditional police are those working in correctional facilities.

When looking at the correctional setting specifically, one example comes from Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), which commissioned the Violence Reduction Project to tackle the rising levels of assaults against staff and

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prisoners. The findings indicated that the majority of staff and almost half (41 percent) of prisoners who completed the survey felt that the introduction of BWCs had a positive impact on the prisons. They expressed increased levels of perceived safety, potential deterrence and effective de-escalation of incidents, as well as pointing out the provision of evidence that protects both staff and prisoners.

The value of body worn cameras has been studied and proven effective, and the benefits by far outweigh the costs of not having a system. However, this does not mean that challenges don't still exist when designing, deploying and managing a body-worn system within such facilities.

Throughout the years, security cameras have become critical assets to many different types of end users. While camera technology has been in use in the correctional setting since the early Nineties, the security camera technology available to correctional institutions today has drastically improved, along with the software that supports it.

Security cameras provide invaluable evidence to understand what transpired at a specific time. However, most security cameras are installed in static, permanent positions with fixed fields of view. This presents challenges to a correctional institution, particularly trying to cover every blind spot. In addition, these cameras generally don't include audio in their streams, which would help the staff understand tone or intent of the person in question.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Both blind spots and not having audio close to where the incident transpired can create issues during post-incident reviews. One of the ways this can be resolved is with body-worn cameras. Footage taken from the correctional officers' first-hand perspective can help tell a more complete story than a security camera might be able to. The institution may even capture multiple angles from various correctional officers responding to a specific scene.

Body-worn cameras can capture an entire incident as it transpires and even have the ability to capture pre-event video through pre-buffer technology. This pre-buffer helps to capture the activity leading up to the actual incident, which can be invaluable.

In recent years, body-worn video has proven very effective to law enforcement and correctional officers as they help to remove the 'he said/she said,' which in turn helps to resolve incidents and complaints faster. As a result, correctional officers can get back to work sooner and management can take actions that need to be taken with confidence. This makes the correctional institution more efficient and increases the quality of the working environment for all involved.

One of the biggest benefits of utilising body-worn cameras in a correctional setting is to assist in investigating Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) complaints. An inmate knowing that a BWC is being used provides them and the prison officer with a sense of comfort knowing that the interaction is being recorded, particularly during specific activities such as cell extractions and strip searches.

One of the major differences between a traditional law-enforcement officer and a correctional officer is the number of interactions they may have during

a given shift and therefore the amount of camera footage generated. A correctional officer can have around 40 – 80 BWC activations a day, while a police officer will have far fewer.

This is an inevitable result of the work being done and the environment each works within. A law-enforcement officer is traditionally dispatched to an incident and the camera is activated before arrival or, for instance, when they are performing traffic stops throughout their shift. In contrast, a correctional officer is constantly within an environment where they may need to activate their camera more frequently due to the policies set in place by the correctional institution to ensure the safety of both the officer and the inmate. Body-worn camera policies may require the officer to activate their camera for situations including communication with an inmate, any type of inspection or interview,

FOOTAGE TAKEN FROM A FIRST-HAND PERSPECTIVE CAN HELP TO TELL A MORE COMPLETE STORY

supervision of recreational time, cell extraction, refusal by an inmate for a service and more.

Due to the nature of a correctional setting, there is a significant need for BWC systems to be flexible. Flexibility enables them to integrate with existing systems, allows for various ways of sharing cameras and for unique features and functions. Perhaps most importantly, flexibility allows for meeting the budgetary needs of the correctional institution.

STARTING OUT

Many correctional institutions have already made significant investments in surveillance systems. By investing in a BWC solution and leveraging the existing infrastructure, an institution may simply need to expand its storage solution instead of having to invest in a cloud solution or a completely different on-prem storage array for an independent system. This can prove to be a very cost-effective way to begin a body worn camera programme.

However, the biggest cost savings come down to training and incident review. Existing staff that have access to the surveillance system are already trained and know how to manage users and the system data. Not having to spend time training staff on a completely new software solution can save an institution many hours of time. In terms of incident review, the staff will also already know how to search for video and will be able to present the fixed camera and body-worn camera video within the same viewer.

Being more efficient is also possible with how video is stored. Most institutions utilise a specific retention period for recorded video, from a few days to several years. With most of the footage being recorded and then falling under the retention policy for video deletion, on-prem storage can be feasible.

However, in cases where cloud storage is preferred or requested, having a system that provides the institution with the ability to choose, migrate or have a combination of the two can help the institution

deploy a system that will grow with them over time. This type of flexibility can also greatly reduce the current cloud storage costs year on year and allow the institution to make the best decision to meet their needs.

Finally, by utilising existing systems, the institution can explore other third-party evidence management software (EMS) that could be from a variety of different vendors versus having to utilise one EMS solution from a single manufacturer. Combining a video management software with a best-of-breed EMS can also reduce overall cost and still provide the institution with advanced capabilities of a full-fledged EMS, making it easy

PRE-BUFFER FEATURES HELPS TO CAPTURE THE ACTIVITY LEADING UP TO AN ACTUAL INCIDENT

to share data with respective parties, digitally, without having to use thumb drives or DVDs and maintaining chain of custody throughout.

The correctional environment can have a wide array of employee types and people who may or may not need wearable cameras. Having a variety of ways to manage devices can help the institution design a system that will meet its needs.

Some institutions decide to assign each individual user their own body-worn camera, which ensures accountability for that device. However, some

are too large and need to share BWCs among users and keep a manual or digital record of who has what camera and on what shift. This is to ensure recorded video clips can be easily found when a claim is made.

When considering a BWC system it is important to evaluate different offerings to ensure the institution is aware of the various technologies available. One of the more unique ways that enables rapid deployment of cameras, while also assisting with inventory management, are systems that support the ability to utilise a card credential, which can auto assign the user's data to an available BWC. This creates a check-in and check-out system for each camera.

Such an approach can significantly reduce the amount of cameras needed by an institution through the ability to pool BWCs, as well as have an easy way to review video and identify who is wearing the camera upon incident review. This type of system would have the ability to overlay the officer's data over the recorded video.

Today, body-worn cameras can address the various challenges of correctional institutions. They can reduce blind spots, introduce tone and intent through audio recording, help to de-escalate scenarios before they turn into physical altercations, provide cyber secure video, which will stand up in court, and all the while create a safer more secure correctional institution.

It's crucial to acknowledge the unique challenges faced in a correctional setting in comparison with traditional law-enforcement officers. Understanding the nature of work being carried out by correctional institutions highlights an even greater need for flexible body-worn cameras systems ●

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