

# TAKING GUARDS OFF DUTY

## UCIT Online set to replace security guards across GTA

MATTHEW DESROSIERS – The GTA Construction Report Special Feature

Security guards around the GTA are making their last rounds, thanks to an innovative company that is simply doing a better job.

UCIT Online is the brainchild of entrepreneur Sidney Sommer, owner and managing director of the company.

“It is a little unique,” he said. “We are able to watch sites from our monitoring centre instead of putting a guard out on a construction site.”

He got the idea while working for an aerospace company designing video black boxes. Instead of only recording voice and data, these also record video of the cockpit during flight. It was there that he was first introduced to digital cameras.

Although these kinds of companies have existed in Europe for a number of years, the technology, and this specific application of it, was not widely used in North America. In 2003, Sommer started up the company.

Everyone has seen security cameras before, however, UCIT Online uses top of the line Axis IP Cameras together with its DE-TEXI Video Management Software which allows for remote viewing and recording from anywhere in the world. What this means is from a central monitoring station, UCIT Online employees are able to watch sites and catch thieves red-handed.

“The biggest problem with the guards on some of these larger projects is they do hourly tours,” Sommer said. “You know if a guard just walked by, he won’t be back for another hour. Whereas, with our product, we’re constantly monitoring every street on the site.”

The cameras detect motion. When the alarm is activated on the site, an employee begins watching live. The minute they see a crime in progress, for example, someone

stopping to load up some extra materials lying around, the police are called. The company is able to provide the authorities with vital information such as the license plate number, description of the vehicle, and description of the suspect. Because it is considered a verified crime in progress, it gets top priority from the police.

“We have very fast police response times.”

One of the primary reasons insurance companies insist on the use of security guards is to report fires. The companies are more concerned about a site burning down than material being stolen, Sommer said. His system, however, also protects against fires.

The cameras detect changes in lighting conditions, so fires can be detected at an early stage. Once again, a monitoring centre employee will immediately call the authorities, and a fire team is dispatched to the site.

“Our system right now is the only system approved by the major insurance companies to replace a guard on site.”

Before the insurance companies would approve the system, UCIT Online had to prove itself on a test site. During the demonstration, the insurance companies paid very close to attention to the systems results. The system produced two arrests within a short time-period, and convinced the insurance companies that it did, in fact, work.

Since UCIT Online went mainstream in the GTA, they continue to average two arrests per week, a number that security guard companies are simply unable to attain.

Although the cameras are only monitored after hours, they record 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

“A lot of thefts happen in the middle of the day, so our cameras record everything



that happens during the day,” Sommer said. “It’s not just theft that’s a problem on construction sites, things also get damaged.”

For example, if someone knocks over a lamppost, it could cost the builder a significant amount of money to fix. The company instead calls the UCIT Online office to request the appropriate tape, and is able to determine who should be back-charged for the damages.

It didn’t take long for the UCIT Online security system to spread throughout the GTA market.

“It was a very easy sell,” Sommer said. “Low-rise builders here were fed up with paying a lot of money for security guards, and still end up losing a ton of equipment and materials.”

They are currently active on over 200 sites in the area. UCIT Online employs 35 trained operators at its monitoring centre, and an additional 20 employees for installation and customer service, with room to grow. The system is able to replace security guards in almost any setting.

Apart from superior results, UCIT Online is successful because it is less costly than hiring guards. Depending on the site, they tend to be between 25 and 50 per cent less expensive than hiring security guards. There are no upfront fees to install the UCIT Online system. All equipment belongs to the company, and is installed by the company. Clients only pay the monthly security fee, which allows for a smooth transition from guards to the UCIT Online system.

“If anything breaks, we fix it immediately,” Sommer said. “We keep the system up and running 24/7.”

Recently, Sommer added a new program to the company’s services.

The Remote Concierge Service targets the condominium and apartment market, he said. It automates various tasks normally saved for a doorman, including opening and closing doors, accepting and sending packages, and doing live video guard tours of the property for security purposes.

“The biggest problem with taking the man out of the condo is that he usually accepts packages,” Sommer said. “FedEx, UPS and Purolator love the system because so many times they have to take packages

back because someone didn’t answer the door. This way, it’s guaranteed to be left on site.”

The remote concierge works on the same premises as site security. Cameras are placed at the front door, in the lobby, and throughout the public areas of the building. A delivery person, for example, would ‘buzz in’ to the building. The monitoring centre receives the alert, confirms the identity of the delivery person, and allows them in the building. From there, a special package room with an automated locked door is opened, and the delivery is made to the appropriate mailbox, as specified by the monitoring centre through a speaker system. The recipient is alerted in his or her apartment, and they come down to the room to retrieve the package, following a similar process of identity confirmation.

The same concept is applied to picking up packages, and every delivery or pickup is archived in the event a mistake is made, or the recipient picks up the wrong package.

As word spreads about UCIT Online and their highly efficient, cost effective security and video surveillance system, the company will continue to grow as it has over the last few years. The monitoring centre is only at 15 per cent capacity, Sommer said. With more contracts and sites to monitor, they will be able to fill up the extra space with more employees in the centre.

Already, the company has sites in London, Barrie, Oshawa, and even a few starting projects in Alberta. Over 52 major builders, developers and property management companies in Southern Ontario, are currently using their system. However, Sommer has his mind set on further expansion in Ontario, and beyond.

“I’ll be happy if next year we expand to Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Ottawa.”

UCIT Online is taking the security industry by storm. Over the last five years, the company has established itself as one of the most effective security systems in the GTA, making the security guard nearly obsolete. With new services hitting the market, it won’t be long until this system is in every major Ontario city, keeping everything, and everyone, secure.



# UCITonline

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