

At the Frontline: Foxwoods Resort Casino's Tim Bohr

Casino surveillance director discusses how video watches over one of the world's largest casinos



Tim Bohr, surveillance director of the MGM Grand at Foxwoods Casino in Mashantucket, Conn., manages a surveillance system that includes more than 4,000 video cameras and covers more than 340,000 square feet of gaming space.

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Covering 4.7 million square feet with 340,000 square feet dedicated to gaming space, the MGM Grand at Foxwoods Casino located in Mashantucket, Conn., is one of the largest gaming facilities in the world.

One of the people in charge of keeping operations at the resort running smoothly is Foxwoods Surveillance Director Tim Bohr, who monitors the actions of the thousands of guests and staff who move throughout the facility on a daily basis.

Bohr worked in physical security and investigations within the banking industry before joining Foxwoods 13 years ago. Now he is charged with overseeing a massive surveillance network which includes more than 4,000 cameras.

In this "At the Frontline" interview, Bohr discusses how emerging video technologies have changed gaming security and how it helps him and others in the industry keep tabs on those who attempt to defraud casinos.

How many different areas of the casino and gaming stations are being monitored by your CCTV system at a given time?

We monitor any areas that have money handling areas, anything with table games, slots, cages, count rooms. All gaming-related activities are monitored by surveillance. I have three different surveillance monitoring rooms throughout the complex. We basically have five casinos under one roof.

What are some of your primary challenges in monitoring a casino of that size?

Most of our challenges are just sheer volume. We average anywhere from 45,000 to 75,000 people a day through the resort. We use a lot of the newer technology to supplement our staffing. Our staff is probably one of the highest trained staffs in the industry. We put them through a tremendous amount of training and certification to work here. But the volume of people coming through and the scams we're looking for -- both internal and external -- create daily challenges.

What are some of the types of scams that you have to watch out for?

We're constantly tracking cheating teams that are known throughout the industry. We track them by talking to other casinos on a daily basis to try and determine where these people are at all times. Obviously, you have your local players that try to take advantage of different aspects of the casino by cheating, whether it be simple betting and capping to more sophisticated card counting or collusion with dealers. We are constantly tracking individuals that we have knowledge of and we're constantly identifying other individuals we believe that may be beginning to start a team to try and cheat or feel their way around and see if it's worth it here or not.

How have CCTV and emerging video technologies affected surveillance in the gaming industry?

Obviously, the big switch was from VCR [to DVRs], now the big thing is from digital to IP. IP in a casino this large hasn't taken off yet because it's just cost prohibitive to do at this point. We run in excess of 4,000 cameras throughout our complex so to change all of those over to IP would have been cost prohibitive to do. There are certainly areas where we will utilize IP cameras and we'll identify those on a need-to-need basis. The technology out there now, the digital technology, the camera technology that's out there now far surpasses the previous types of equipment that were available so we utilize the newest and best equipment that we can possibly get out hands on.

How has switching from VCRs to DVRs impacted the surveillance department?

Just the man hours you save in changing tapes and the costs of replacing tapes is tremendous. It's just a much cleaner technology, more details to search for an incident. It's a hundred times faster than anything in the past. Obviously, anything on DVRs can be retrieved from any station within any monitoring room. You no longer have to get up, go out, get a tape, come back, bring it in, and rewind it. We've been digital here for about six years, so we kind of made the switch early on in the industry. But even the technology that's emerging today -- the fine tuning of digital systems -- is just leaps and bounds compared to what it used to be.

What kind of effect has security management software had on your ability to monitor the casino?

We use a program here from iView Systems where all calls we receive or any incidents are all logged electronically and we can attach video to it. We worked out a deal with the software company that we use for our report writing and the recording company to where they've linked their two systems so now everything is completed in a nice, clean package. So you'll have a report, photos, and video all burned to one DVD and that's what we use if we have to go to court.

How do you go about tracking and identifying known or suspected cheaters who may try to enter the facility?

We keep a database here through a facial recognition program and then we have a networking system built up with other casinos so we network on a daily basis with them. We're tracking them throughout the country and even outside the country. I talk to Australia on occasion and other countries these people visit and so forth. We try to track them on every move they make.

How does your facial recognition system work?

We'll enter their faces into the system and then we have prepositioned cameras throughout our complex. As people walk in, the cameras take a look at everyone and if there is a match, it will alert us that there is a match and give us a percentage of who it thinks the person is. Then we'll physically pull the camera up and make our own determination from that point.

Do you use your CCTV system for any practical uses outside of the gaming or money handling areas?

We're implementing areas now for more customer service usage. We'll have people counting, so if there is a line too long at a cashier station we'll be able to alert a department that they need more people. We can use CCTV for a variety of different purposes and that's where the technology pays for itself in other ways that it wasn't able to in the past.

Has the approach that casinos have taken to surveillance changed over the years and are they leading the way as far as implementing new technologies are concerned?

I can speak for us. Absolutely! I have a tribal council here that backs me up 100 percent on wanting to remain state-of-the-art, so as long as I can justify the return to them, they're very eager to stay state-of-the-art. They rely very, very heavily on the surveillance department to protect their assets so they're willing to spend the money to make sure we have the equipment we need to do that. That's more common, I would say, in area of tribal casinos. They put more money and more technology into their surveillance than some of the public casinos, but that's just one type of difference between public and tribal casinos.

Are you currently doing anything to improve your surveillance system?

We revamp our system quite often. We're always searching and testing other products in other areas to see if there's anything new and emerging out there that we would like to add to our system. We work very closely with some major manufacturers on developing new products and also new ways to use their equipment in the casino industries. We're probably one of the largest beta testing sites for a lot of major manufacturing companies in the industry. We welcome companies to bring in new technologies to use, let us play around with it, let us determine if we feel it's something that's going to be good for the industry or not.

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