



Foxwoods: The 'Mecca' of Casino Surveillance

By Willy J. Allison

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting Foxwoods Resort Casino located in Mashantucket, Conn. At first glance the mere size is a little overwhelming, but when you have the opportunity to explore the property, you realize Foxwoods has achieved the perfect balance of gaming, entertainment, state-of-the-art technology and a harmonious environment.

Foxwoods, I discovered, is actually six casinos and three hotels built in a multi-purpose complex nestled in the woods of Connecticut. The massive gaming floor features over 380 table games and 7,400 slot machines, and is monitored vigilantly by a team of game security experts with access to over 4,000 cameras strategically located around the complex.

"The Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation takes the integrity of their gaming operation very seriously," Tim Bohr, Foxwoods surveillance director, told me as he led me down a long stairwell beneath the complex. When he opened the door at the bottom, I could see he wasn't kidding. It almost felt surreal to stand on the polished marble-like floor looking up at the majestic high ceilings while taking in the ambience of the room. Was this one of the six casinos I had heard about? No. It was a surveillance monitor room.

My first impression was that I had just gone through a time tunnel and had come out 20 years in the future. The monitor room is huge. What else should I have expected from a casino that is so big it has its own zip code?

After I realized I wasn't standing in some sort of high-tech sports book, I suddenly had the urge to yell like I did the first time I visited the Grand Canyon. I refrained. I didn't want to spoil the soft acoustics of classical music being piped through the sound system, not to mention the focus and concentration of the attentive surveillance officers in the room. Besides, Bohr advised me that they had sound proofed the room to stop that very thing.

The monitor room was built two years ago as part of the continued expansion of "the world's largest casino." It is one of two surveillance rooms dedicated to maintaining the integrity of the gaming operation. The success and constant growth of Foxwoods has dictated the need for two surveillance rooms, and it doesn't stop there. Plans are already in the works for an unprecedented third surveillance room to be constructed and completed by 2008.

For a surveillance guy, this is as close as it gets to the "mecca" of casino surveillance. The monitor room is truly the Cadillac Escalade of monitor rooms. Big, luxurious and built

for comfort, the room is conducive for speed and high performance. A massive panoramic monitor wall projects dozens of images from the casino floor that can be seen from any seat in the house. It feels like you are floating above the casino like Peter Pan.

The entire 4,000-camera system is recorded digitally. The digital recording system is stored in a separate room adjacent to the monitor room with electronically controlled access. Walking into the room, I felt like I should be wearing a white lab coat. It is spotless. The recording units are housed in 12-foot-tall cabinets custom built in the Foxwoods colors.

A closer look at the individual operator workstations in the monitor room confirms the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation's commitment to preserving the environment: There's not a shred of paper in the room. Bohr has worked closely with a company called iView Systems to develop and introduce an integrated reporting system that has made his department virtually paperless. Casino surveillance departments have been guilty over the years of generating lots of paperwork, but the trend in recent years has been to move toward computerized reporting systems that can not only link to extensive databases that include images of persons of interest, but can also provide archived information at one's fingertips.

For casino surveillance departments, information is the lifeblood of a good game protection program. Bohr's team has access to game tracking systems maintained by casino management that allow them to receive real time information of the status on the gaming floor. This helps them to be pro-active instead of reactive.

In the casino industry, it has been widely recognized that the bigger the casino, the bigger the target for cheats and criminals. In mega casinos like Foxwoods, the mere size and volume of gaming activity requires an innovative approach to game protection. To make sure things don't slip through the gaps, any activity that is outside the norm is investigated by one of two investigators within the department whose primary responsibility is to follow up "red flags."

The department also houses an analysis lab for investigating players suspected of using advantage play techniques. By designating specific areas for different tasks, the department can effectively follow up leads that deserve more attention outside the day-to-day hustle and bustle of a high-volume monitor room.

While many casinos across the country flounder on investing money to upgrade their archaic security systems from

videotapes to digital, the Foxwoods surveillance team has almost forgotten the old analog days. No more having to search through hours and hours of videotape or having to manually change thousands of tapes daily to maintain a video library that is only required less than 1 percent of the time. "We are way past those days," Bohr said. "The future for us is software."

With the digitization of the surveillance system, the foundation has been set to take advantage of exciting new game security technology on the horizon. Bohr and his team are currently researching technology that will automatically alert his team to gaming "abnormalities."

Smart software is currently being developed by digital technology manufacturers that will potentially recognize when something on camera is "not right." For example, a camera input could be programmed to recognize late bets on Roulette after the dealer waves no more bets. The surveillance team would automatically be alerted whether they were watching the game or not. In essence, the vision for the future is for cameras to be programmed to be detectives.

Earlier this year, the Foxwoods surveillance team uncovered a scam by a professional cheating team that could have cost the casino millions of dollars a month if gone undetected. Thanks to the speed and efficiency of the surveillance operation, the scam was detected and the appropriate action taken. Technology played a big part in the detection of the scam and assisting the authorities in their investigations.

Without doubt, Foxwoods is leading the charge by Indian casinos to become world leaders in surveillance technology. My visit to Foxwoods gave me a glimpse into the future of casino surveillance and showed me what can be achieved when you invest in smart people and smart technology. **NAC**

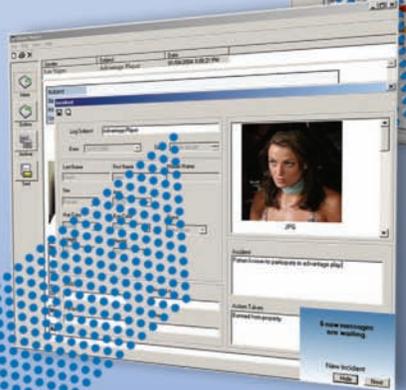
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