

Customer Satisfaction Is The Key To Success

The CCTV industry is awash with digital video recorders. At the last count there were more than 250 manufacturers who solely, or as part of a broader product range, offer digital recording solutions. Is the market big enough for them all to survive, let alone prosper? Unlikely, perhaps. A large share of the market has already been grabbed by just a handful of manufacturers. The main challenge however is how to stand out from the crowd with so many of the available machines seemingly offering almost identical features and functions. One UK manufacturer that is steadily carving out for itself a significant share of the digital video recording market is Videoswitch. Managing Director and founder of the company, Roland Simmons, answers some questions about the past, present - and future.

Q: Roland, what was the road that led you to being involved in the manufacture of digital video recording?

A: I come from an electronic engineering background. When the company was set up in 1984, the CCTV market was still at the embryonic stage but it seemed obvious even then that there was going to be a great opportunity for a manufacturer that could introduce innovative products. We successfully built our business by supplying the market with multiplexers, real time quads, telemetry and video switchers but saw early on what the digital revolution could offer the CCTV industry. When the time was right we moved in to the design and manufacture of DVRs.

Q: Have you been surprised at the dramatic growth in the demand for DVRs?

A: Not really. There was an initial reluctance among end-users, specifiers, consultants and installers alike to seriously consider digital recording as an alternative to the conventional method i.e. analogue VCRs. This was mainly due to the fact that the cost/performance ratio of DVRs was poor. The first generation of DVRs had limited storage capacity. The turning point has been the introduction of high capacity hard drives. Objections as to the reliability of evidence recorded on DVRs have also been overcome. It should also be appreciated that the growth in demand for the recording of video images is not just for security applications. Increasingly end-users are seeing the benefits of using CCTV to record and store video images for management information

and health & safety reasons

Q: So what do you estimate to be the size of the DVR market?

A: It is probably currently in the region of £60m per annum in the UK but I believe demand will continue to grow.

Q: That is clearly big business but with so many manufacturers offering DVRs, are you confident Videoswitch can compete for a sizable share of the market?

A: We already have a significant market share and I am very optimistic. I believe that total customer satisfaction is the key to success and we constantly strive to maintain customer loyalty.

Q: How do you distinguish yourself from your competition as far as your customers are concerned?

A: I see no point including functionality that customers do not require,

are unlikely to use and should therefore not have to pay for. Our approach has been therefore to anticipate requirements and build into our DVRs the important functions that are relevant to our customers.

Q: So how do you go about deciding what functionality to build into your products?

A: It's a very simple formula based on listening to our customers rather than watching what other manufacturers are doing. Although we supply our products through distributors, we take every opportunity to listen to the views of installers and respond accordingly.

Q: I think every manufacturer would claim to do that. Could you give me some examples of how your product development has been influenced by you listening to customers?

A: Our research has taught us that ease of operation is of paramount importance. A good example is in the way our DVRs are programmed. Our easy to use on screen menu allows customers to stipulate the required image retention period e.g. seven or 31 days. This is in contrast to most other systems where the lifetime of images on the hard disc is dependent on customers setting the image update rate, the image quality and the capacity of the hard disk. Customers also want an easy and convenient method of transferring images from a DVR. This is why we have included, as a standard feature on all our DVRs, a

CD writer.

Recordings of any incidents can be transferred onto a CD with just three button presses. Another example of responding to customer's requirements is the inclusion in our DVRs of a true real time quad display.

Needless to say, reliability is also very important and so we have just introduced new hard drives into all our machines. I believe we are the first UK manufacturer to utilize the new 300Gbytes Maxline hard drives, which are specifically, designed for 24 hours a day, seven days a week continuous recording.

The reliability of the hard drives is backed by a three-year warranty from the manufacturer, Maxtor. We have designed and built our DVRs with twin removable drives in direct response to customer demand, allowing installers to service or upgrade a machine without having to remove it from site.

Q: Are you planning to introduce any new products?

A: Absolutely. We are in fact currently in the process of launching a range of compact four and nine channel DVRs that will complement our existing high-end range. These new DVRs are aimed at customers who would otherwise continue to look at using conventional VCRs and multiplexers. Prices and features have been tailored for this specific market segment.



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