

The Analog Sacrifice

OUR MISSION TO DRIVE THE cost of the system down without sacrificing any checklist features was accomplished entirely by converting from IP-based digital cameras to analog cameras. The lower cost of the field devices coupled with reduced infrastructure costs allowed us to meet our budgetary goal, and even add some features that weren't on the list.

But what sacrifices did our client have to make for the almighty dollar? As it turns out, not much in this application.

As a consulting firm, we are very supportive of IP-based video systems. We believe the market is moving in that direction and have many projects under our belt that are purely IP.

That being said, the role of a consultant is to help their client select appropriate technologies for their application. Unless you can point to a specific need that can only be answered by IP-based equipment, you may be recommending technology based on hype rather than experience.

One example of such a technology is megapixel cameras. They provide features — such as video forensic capabilities, reduced camera count and often reduced frame rate requirements because of their greater viewing area — that cannot be matched by analog. Deployment of cameras using existing infrastructure is another example, and when you've got a computer network handy and need to move a signal, nothing works as well as digital.

However, we're not buying some of the "future proof" arguments just yet. We've heard analog will be obsolete some day and those cameras will have to be replaced. While we concur, some of the advances we've seen the past two years lead us to conclude that you'll have to replace IP cameras as well.

Better, more reliable products will come along at much lower cost. For the price of an IP camera today, you'll likely be able to buy an analog camera now plus an IP camera down the line and bank money in the process.

In the case of Hamilton Mall, IP technology did not offer any features that were needed today. The video quality of analog was more than sufficient and the hybrid system gave them all of the advantages of a digital video system at significantly lower cost.

We were careful to preserve the upgrade path, and we will continue monitoring the client's needs and available technology. With electronics equipment, it pays to buy what you need — not what the marketing material tells you.