

Case Study

Avis Budget Group

A vehicle rental conglomerate invests in an integrated license plate recognition, access control and video surveillance solution to protect their massive vehicle fleet in the greater Toronto area.



With two of the most recognized brands in the vehicle rental industry, Avis Budget Group is believed to be the largest general-use vehicle rental operator in North America. Last year, the car rental giant completed about 27 million vehicle rental transactions worldwide and derived an estimated 80% of their total annual revenue from on-airport locations.

Business challenge

In Canada specifically, the Avis Budget Group is headquartered in Toronto where a large fleet of vehicles is kept in close proximity to service the on-airport location of Pearson International Airport as well as the local greater Toronto branches. On a daily basis at the Canadian headquarters, between 700 and 800 rental vehicles are constantly coming in to get cleaned and serviced, and going out to accommodate the bookings at various branches. This continuous exchange of vehicles induces vulnerability to vehicle theft and Avis Budget Group was no stranger to that fact. At some point in time, they became aware that certain vehicles that were leaving the lot were no longer coming back.

As forward-thinking innovators, the Avis Budget Group did have a legacy AutoVu license plate recognition (LPR) system in place at their headquarters, however, the technology had since evolved and thus they decided to explore new improved technologies which would benefit them in the same way AutoVu had in the past. With an on-going investigation about suspected vehicle thefts, Avis Budget Group pro-actively initiated their own search for a new solution that would keep their vehicle fleet safe.

Avis Budget Group's security needs

Vehicle theft and trafficking is a problem that is ongoing in our society. Cars are being taken straight from owners' driveways, but more so in largely dispersed parking areas such as shopping malls or headquarter buildings where theft can be more discreet. Avis Budget Group had an even tougher challenge, as continuous vehicle movement let perpetrators blend in with regular in-out activity.

As the City Manager for Avis Budget Group's Toronto Operations was tasked with finding a new security solution that would help prevent future vulnerability at the headquarters. They were familiar with the AutoVu system and realized the potential that the technology offered, but had a more aggressive plan in mind: "We

needed an automated system that would give us the traceability we required on both the vehicles and their drivers," said the manager.

What they were looking for was more than an LPR solution, but additionally, an advanced access control solution with integrated video surveillance which could provide Avis Budget Group with the ability to track their entire stock of vehicles with evidence to support the in-out activity. The plan was also to extend this solution beyond the gates of their headquarters into other locations such the airport branches.

More than an integrated and scalable system, Avis management were also looking for a dependable and responsive solution, one that would be able to accommodate a large volume of vehicles coming and going. "We needed quick response from the complete solution as someone approached the entrance or exit, so that we would not hold up the gate. With 1000 moves within a working day, we just don't have the extra time to wait 10 seconds at each swipe of a card."

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Last on their list of criteria was the need for a reliable supplier. "We are a company that is not really familiar with IP solutions and this was a big investment," said the Avis spokesperson. "It was important that our supplier was able to explain to us how this new equipment and infrastructure would help us accomplish our objectives."

After considering other products on the market, the security team at Avis Budget soon realized that those other solutions just did not meet their specific requirements. Being familiar with AutoVu, Avis contacted Genetec once again and was pleasantly surprised to find the Genetec suite, including IP-based LPR, access control and video surveillance solutions were exactly what Avis Budget Group needed. At this point, Genetec referred them to Robert Cairns, President at Cairn Control Systems, Inc. to help with implementation of their new solution.

The perfect solution

Today, Genetec's AutoVu is deployed at two main Avis Budget Group Toronto locations: their Canadian headquarters and their Dixon road maintenance facility, located just outside the airport. Each site has two lanes of traffic (one going in and one going out) and each lane is equipped with an AutoVu Sharp LPR camera, totaling 4 LPR cameras. More so, Genetec's Synergis and Omnicast are deployed at three locations, including the same two locations where the LPR cameras are installed, as well as the Pearson International Airport location. Avis Budget Group invested in access control readers and video cameras which are also positioned at each lane of all three locations, to capture badge credentials and video footage of drivers and cars entering and exiting each facility, using Synergis and Omnicast.

"This is really an enhanced version of AutoVu," pointed out the Avis team manager. "With the new AutoVu Sharp camera in place, the plate capture is much better in comparison to what we had previously. Also, Genetec provided us with all three components that we were looking for, giving us access control, LPR and video evidence of everything that is going on," they said.

The security team were also pleased with the processing speed of AutoVu. The IP-based nature of AutoVu, Synergis and Omnicast offered quick response time in terms of image capture and on-the-spot granted (or denied) access to driver's coming and going from each lot. In a matter of seconds, the card is swiped, the license plate is scanned and Omnicast captures all related footage, including a distinct image of the driver's face in case further investigation is needed. All information from all locations is then transferred back to the client application in real-time via a LAN connection.

Additionally, since all three systems were developed by Genetec, the level of integration between Synergis access control and AutoVu LPR within the Omnicast video management platform provided Avis Budget Group with correlated information through a unique feature called the Metadata Engine. Thanks to this feature, every license plate that is scanned is automatically indexed to the associated video and access control data for easy retrieval. Integration of all data in one platform provides operators with the tools to make quick assessments of situations and more in-depth decision.

"This entire system is so easy to use. It really enables us to find the information that we are looking for," said the Avis Budget Group manager. "In an investigation, which was key to adopting this new solution, we now have the data we need at the tip of our fingers."

The solution that Avis Budget Group chose has been ideal, not only for the innovative features, but for the very positive customer experience the entire team had working with Genetec and systems integrator, Cairn Control Systems, Inc.

"Everyone we have worked with has been extremely co-operative," the team manager said. "Both Genetec and Cairn Control Systems really took the time to work with our IT administrator and make sure we were getting a solution that would help us meet our goals."

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Benefits

Since the initial deployment, the system has been fully upgraded to the Genetec unified security platform called Security Center. A step beyond simple integration, Genetec Security Center seamlessly merges IP video surveillance, access control and license plate recognition systems within a single innovative platform. Every aspect of Avis' security operations is consolidated under this single platform, from real-time monitoring to alarm management, reporting, and playback of events.

The AutoVu system within the Security Center also now includes hotlist matching of vehicles that are scheduled for buy-back. Avis operators receive an alarm when a vehicle on the buy-back list is identified as entering the facility. This added feature provides Avis's team with timely identification of vehicles that are scheduled to be removed from the active vehicle fleet.

With the Genetec unified Security Center platform firmly in place at major locations, Avis Budget Group has achieved its main objective: securing their fleet of vehicles. Today, the management team is proud to report: "We have zero cars missing since implementation." Nevertheless, the production manager at Avis Budget Group uses the system every day, even from home through the remote access capabilities, in case they need to know on the spot where a vehicle might be located.





More than that however, as a forward-thinking player in their industry, Avis Budget Group has also been using the integrated solution for cross-departmental functions. For instance, the distribution department at Avis Budget Group, a team responsible for managing vehicle inventory levels at all locations, has been actively using the system to physically see what inventory each location is carrying and then dispatch vehicles accordingly. “We used to call each location, but now we can actually see how many cars are parked [at the location], and how many people need to be sent to transport vehicles,” concluded the team manager.

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The possibility for other departments to use the system allows companies such as Avis Budget Group to distribute the total cost of ownership across many departments' budget.

Overall, Avis Budget Group has certainly justified the expense of ownership of this new Genetec solution. The implementation and use of the system has been so successful in fact, that they have introduced the Security Center unified security platform to their US counterparts, who are now looking into a similar project.

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