

Belgium's largest retail chain trusts in video surveillance

| Colruyt Group | *Belgium*

An owner-managed company of the size of the Colruyt Group is a rare phenomenon in the world of large corporations, and that makes the development of what began as a small Belgian general store all the more remarkable. Today, Colruyt has more than 570 stores and almost 30,000 employees in three countries —

Belgium, France and Luxembourg. It also serves a variety of markets, selling organic produce, baby care items, children's products and trappings for urban lifestyles. Over time, the company has become one of the most important retail chains in Europe.





The challenge

In any retail environment, whether it's a single small village shop or a huge company with an extensive chain of stores, the loss of goods can create a significant dent in revenue. Customers, employees and service companies can all contribute to shrinkage, so preventing theft is a complicated endeavor. To minimize these losses as much as possible, large retail chains like Colruyt have to invest in infrastructure to monitor merchandise and catch thieves. With more than 500 stores, in Colruyt's case, a significant expenditure is necessary, both to procure the technology (cameras, network, servers, software) and train staff when new solutions are rolled out. That means protecting investments is even more important.

To safeguard company property — goods and buildings — Colruyt has been using video technology for many years. In the past, the video material was stored on DVRs and viewed on-site because devices could not be accessed from a central remote location. Eventually, though, numerous new branches in Europe and the diversification of the company — into freeway service stations, for example — highlighted the limitations of the existing analog systems.

Colruyt's core management team in Halle, Belgium, directed its IT department to examine and evaluate alternatives, with a primary focus on a flexible approach that would support the company's growth. Intuitive operation was a non-negotiable requirement, so as not to burden employees on the ground, including store detectives and management, with any more work than absolutely necessary. To further relieve staff, perimeter security for stores and office buildings was needed to be handled from a central surveillance point.



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Eric Wynant

Responsible for purchasing technology and real estate at Colruyt

Fast facts

Vertical market

Retail

Products

Qognify VMS

Qognify BVI



The solution

When it came to the search for the new video solution, the focus quickly fell on Qognify VMS, which was recommended by a Belgian partner company. Colruyt largely does without external service companies for everyday operations, preferring to rely on its own resources. This applies to its workshops, vehicle fleets and properties, as well as the IT department, which has been spun off as a subsidiary and handles all the IT systems in stores and office buildings. As vendor- and platform-independent software, Qognify VMS fulfilled Colruyt's wishes to remain independent; Colruyt's own well-trained staff was able to implement and configure the new system in-house, with little operational downtime.

Qognify VMS also met the requirements of scalability and flexibility because it's an IP-based solution that permits both the use of existing infrastructure and the efficient implementation of a centralized approach.

The result

To achieve the desired centrally controlled perimeter surveillance, a surveillance center was set up at Colruyt's headquarters in Halle. The Colruyt IT team uses a large-screen video wall system as its visualization platform, which allows the detailed recorded video material to be displayed clearly. Reports come in from all branches, office buildings and logistics centers. If an alarm is reported, the staff can see what has happened on screen and make an initial assessment. By means of the Display Agent functionality, the monitor wall can be controlled from a conventional Qognify VMS client. For example, current alarms can be visualized on the video wall and processed step by step from local workstations, so staff can maintain a comprehensive overview and know exactly where there is a need for action.

In addition, Colruyt's large and geographically widespread branch network is clearly displayed on the Qognify VMS client.

While perimeter protection is handled from the surveillance control center, theft prevention is the responsibility of each individual branch — every branch has its own video surveillance system. When necessary, video images can be viewed not just on a branch workstation, but also at the central surveillance center. Each store's existing DVRs were easily integrated into the video management software, and given Colruyt's extensive branch network, the fact that it can continue to use its extant recording systems represents major financial savings.

In such a large, complex network, Qognify VMS' centralized controls are also beneficial. The video management user rights for each member of a store's staff are defined in advance by the central IT department and stored in the software. The IT department also takes care of servicing and maintenance, ensuring local staff is not unnecessarily burdened. The Qognify VMS Auto Updater is a big help here: when the Qognify VMS servers are connected to the internet, the Auto Updater downloads and installs patches, updates and upgrades for the video software automatically.

Alongside cameras and recorded video, Colruyt employs live store detectives for loss prevention. From a corridor behind a mirrored screen above the rows of shelves, detectives have a direct view of the sales floor. At the same time, they can also follow what's happening using Qognify VMS on their personal devices. A fluid display is critical for optimum response time, so when certain conditions are met, the frame rate increases automatically to ensure a steady video stream. In the event of an arrest, the store detective can easily export video material as evidence and make it available to authorities.



The customer

Eric Wynant, who is responsible for purchasing technology and real estate at Colruyt, explained where the project will go from here. “We are gradually discovering the versatility of the software. Only when you deal with something on an everyday basis do you begin to see the potential for improvement that can be exploited with the help of a video management solution,” he said.

“One of the next steps will be the implementation of the BVI logistics solution in order to optimize our warehouses, minimize damage and losses and design smoother processes.”

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