

# Tokenistic "Plug and Play"

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At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the CCTV products of the nineteen-sixties seem like Stone-Age technology.

Back then, not even the most inspired visionaries predicted multifunction IP cameras with megapixel resolution, highly efficient image compression procedures, super-fast computers with all-singing, all-dancing operating systems, a wealth of peripheral devices and network components, not to mention monitoring facilities courtesy of a worldwide Internet. Just a few decades on, these meteoric developments are penetrating a "security-embedded" CCTV sector.

However, on closer inspection the merging of seemingly endless possibilities with the fundamental optical, physical and functional requirements of a CCTV system presents one of the greatest challenges in the history of CCTV technology.

## Lack of compatibility

There is no doubt the new technologies offer many promising and useful functions, but sadly for users, the devotees of IP have neglected to create adequate standards. Standards which would give users the usual freedom to combine the products of different manufacturers as they can with PAL. With PAL you can put together a tailored security system using the modular principle without having to worry about the compatibility of the basic products. IP cameras do not allow this, as unlike the PAL model they transmit images on the basis of the Internet Protocol (IP). However, "IP" only describes the type of transmission; it does not define the application-specific characteristics needed for standardised data exchange. Important camera properties such as image compression, image format, remote control, video analysis, alarm activation and configuration have so far been chosen at the whim of "IP-inoculated" camera manufacturers.

## Lack of transparency

What is needed however is for the producers of hybrid or network video recorders and video management software to integrate the wide variety of IP cameras as soon as possible, not least in order to protect their hard-won market shares. To the disappointment of users, IP cameras that have already been adapted often lack transparency when it comes

to supported functions and comparable statements about that all-important performance while taking into account image rates and image quality. But do users have the right to expect more when they are already getting the driver they need to connect the IP camera for free? Be that as it may, but in the case of PC-based software solutions, the manufacturers often demand a "contribution" for IP-camera compatibility, a fact often buried in the opaque license models so typical of the IT industry.



*Michael Gwozdek: "In the age of globalisation, a worldwide standard for the integration of IP cameras is essential."*

*Image: HeiTel*

implemented worldwide.

## Indispensable standard

In the age of globalisation, a worldwide standard for the integration of IP cameras is essential. For that is the only way to guarantee customers freedom of product choice, trouble-free integration of IP cameras without product-specific developments, and long-term investment protection. Even if some critics believe that rules and standards are an obstacle to technological progress, this is far outweighed by the advantages of a global CCTV standard. It remains to be seen whether the advocates of IP are up to the job in the sense of achieving global security within a respectable timeframe, or whether they will continue to confuse the market with "tokenistic and incompatible all-rounders"

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## Two consortiums

For some time now, two separate consortiums have been working independently on formulating a manufacturer-independent standard. In Europe, Axis Communications, Bosch and Sony have come together under the umbrella of "Open Network Video Interface" (ONVIF), while in the USA Cisco Systems, DVTel, General Electric, Honeywell, IQinVision, Panasonic, Pelco and Verint have formed the "Physical Security Interface Alliance" (PSIA). One fly in the ointment is the fact that although both groups are pursuing the same goal, they have yet to harmonise their work – "with best regards from IP". They are also acting independently of recognised standards bodies, which makes one wonder how these standards will be