

Local Court System Uses LifeSize for Initial Court Appearances

Hall County reduces travel, speeds up the right to due process of law with HD video

Organization

Hall County Magistrate Court, Gainesville, Georgia

Hall County, located in northeastern Georgia, is a thriving community with a population of roughly 170,000. It is the primary business, government and education center of Northeast Georgia, with a diverse economic base that includes farming, banking, financial services and tourism. Hall County is home to the regional Federal Court and the region's largest major hospital, as well as Lake Lanier, which attracts millions of visitors each year from Atlanta.

Local law enforcement strives to make the area as safe and secure as possible for its residents and visitors. Hall County enjoys a low crime rate, but with 40% population growth since 1990, Hall County's 30-year-old jail facility needed to be expanded. In late 2007, Hall County Government completed the construction of a new jail facility. Comprised of two cell blocks, each with three separate floors, the jail has the capacity to house over 1,000 inmates.

In designing the new jail, officials took the opportunity to incorporate advances in communication technology to increase the safety and efficiency of the operation.

Challenge

A key principle of American law is the right to a swift trial and due process. This includes the initial court appearance, a formal reading of all charges against the defendant, a reading of the defendant's rights and setting bail. The Official Code of Georgia Annotated states that a defendant must be given their first appearance in court within 48 to 72 hours of booking.

As necessary as initial appearances in court are, it can be a high-risk, labor intensive process and the nature of some criminals dictates added security for the judge and court officials. Physical security needs become even more complex when defense attorneys, translators and family members are included in the proceedings.



Photo courtesy of www.downtowngainesville.com

"The value of having LifeSize systems throughout our facility has made an enormous impact on the way we communicate. It makes our lives easier while ensuring our inmates a speedy trial."

Josh Thompson
Court Information Systems Manager
Northeastern Judicial Circuit

Challenge: Requirement for minimizing security threats while saving the city time, travel and taxpayer dollars

Solution: HD video in 10 sites within the courthouse and jail, primarily used for the defendant's initial appearance in court

Results: Significant reduction in transportation costs and increased speed of the initial court appearance phase

Above all, a technology solution would allow Hall County to quickly and efficiently process new inmates while reducing the need for transportation. Whether from the jail to the courthouse or just in and around the facility, significantly reducing these major security risks was a critical factor in their overall technology solution.

Solution

Southern Business Communications, an authorized LifeSize reseller and AV integration company, created a customized solution for Hall County. LifeSize® Room™ and LifeSize® Team™ systems were installed in key areas among the courthouse, jail and public defender's office. The call quality of the LifeSize systems was one of the key factors in the selection process for the county. Because LifeSize HD resolution is crisp and clear, county officials can see inmates gestures, facial expressions and read non-verbal cues with ease. Hall County determined that LifeSize created the most realistic experience.

To meet the rigors of life on the inside, an exclusive wall mounted rugged enclosure was created. Made from steel and clear acrylic, this enclosure securely protects a 32" LCD flat panel display and the LifeSize system from anything a disgruntled inmate can throw at it. The unique slotted ventilation system provides passive ventilation while protecting the equipment from any liquids that may come in contact with the enclosure. In short, air gets out, but nothing gets in.

To meet the needs of the magistrate, an intuitive touch screen management device was implemented and connected to the LifeSize system allowing the judge to quickly and easily control every aspect of the hearing. By simply pressing a few buttons, the judge can begin a session, connect and disconnect any number of endpoints, control the camera of far end systems and also record the session to a DVD or IPVCR.

Finally, a Multipoint Control Unit (MCU) and IPVCR is connected to the system. The MCU provides quick connections and a variety of screen layouts that enables Hall County to quickly and effectively move through the daily initial appearance hearings. With a touch of a button on the magistrate system controller, the judge can record and store sessions to the IPVCR for future playback using a web browser or video communications system.

Results

Since the implementation of the LifeSize systems, Hall County has experienced a significant increase in the speed of the initial court appearance cycle and improved communication among these groups.

Not only does the use of video reduce the cost of transporting prisoners on a daily basis, but the technology actually speeds up the right to due process of law for the accused. Now, it's a two minute walk to one of the video rooms and back to the cell. Also, Hall County can now get 30 to 35 inmates in and out of their initial appearance sessions within one hour. Previously, it would take nearly a full day.

LifeSize systems were placed at several key sites within the county's jail system. The jail, public defender and indigent defense offices, magistrate court, and jail lobby of the facility were each outfitted with the necessary equipment. Roughly 10 sites within Hall County are now used for initial appearances and meetings with prisoners.

"Hall County is a great example of how government, law enforcement or really any municipality can better serve their community through the use of HD video," said Craig Malloy, LifeSize CEO. "LifeSize is helping organizations like Hall County save time, manpower and taxpayer dollars because our unparalleled price/performance makes it a simple, cost effective solution for better communication."



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