



Dummy CCTV Cameras: Making the Right Decision

Many people, as well as a number of businesses, look at dummy CCTV cameras as an effective means for deterring criminal activity. Although it can be argued that dummy cameras do have a deterrent quality, we first need to understand the purpose of CCTV cameras before deciding which solution would best fit our needs.

All CCTV cameras, whether dummy or real, are primarily installed as a deterrent to criminal activity. Even with real cameras, it cannot be reasonably expected that a security professional will be monitoring the cameras 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and will actually catch someone “in the act”. Unless you’re using video analytics software that sends real-time event alerts to a central monitoring station that can assess and respond to the event in real time, CCTV cameras are primarily used for deterrence and event/incident investigation and follow up.

What we need to ask ourselves when considering the options of real or dummy cameras is... Can the cameras being installed be considered a reasonable security measure for the circumstances and environment for which they are being considered?

If the cameras are being considered for personal home use, then yes, they may be considered reasonable for their “deterrent effect” only. But I would caution if, and only if, the home is in a low crime area, there is no reasonable expectation of security – which is often the case with home systems – and the cameras purchased are of a high quality with motion detection LEDs. Most experienced criminals can tell the difference between dummy and real CCTV cameras. A motion activated LED that a criminal can see when they are approaching will usually give them pause before proceeding further. Although this is no guarantee that they will not proceed further and commit their crime, raising even the slightest doubt in their mind that they’ll be able to get away with it is always a good thing.

As for businesses, home owners association or community areas, I would never recommend dummy cameras as an effective means for deterring criminal or nefarious activities. The biggest concern here is what is known in legal terms as a “reasonable expectation of security”. If an organization, public or private, has an expectation to provide reasonable security measures for a property and the people on\within it, then dummy cameras should never be considered. If the cameras are being installed to deter internal employee theft, it will not take long before the employees realize that the cameras are not real. All it would take is for one incident to occur and management saying, “We don’t have video for that camera.”, and everyone will know the cameras are fake; thereby shooting their deterrent effect right down the drain. A more troublesome scenario would be an incident that might occur in a building where at least benchmark security measures are expected or guaranteed and a person enters the building and steals property or even worse, assaults someone in the building. The legal liabilities and damage to the company’s public image in these types of events could be very costly; bringing on high legal and settlement fees, and lost business revenue as other organizations may not want to do further business with the company because of its inadequate security measures. The low upfront cost of dummy cameras in these types of environments may very well prove to be more costly in the long run



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than the actual cost of installing a functional CCTV camera system in the first place. These are very real risks that need to be weighed carefully before opting for a dummy camera solution.

Ultimately, the decision on whether or not to install dummy cameras lies with the end user and the level of risk they are willing to accept. In low risk environments where there is no reasonable expectation of security, dummy cameras may very well accomplish the deterrent effect they were installed for. However, in any environment where the property owner is expected to provide reasonable security measures, and especially in high crime areas, it is always better to err on the side of caution and install real CCTV cameras; preferably CCTV systems with video analytics and real-time reporting capabilities.