



COMPUTER TIES IT RESOURCE CENTER • PROJECT CHECKLIST

Security Camera & Access Control Planning Checklist

What to work out before anybody quotes you for cameras or door access, so you get a system that answers the questions you will actually ask it.

FILLABLE PDF

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EDITION

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QUESTIONS?

(517) 788-6393 • computer-ties.com

Camera systems get bought on price and camera count, and then disappoint for years. The footage is there but the face is unusable. The recordings only go back eleven days and the incident was three weeks ago. Nobody except one person knows how to export a clip.

None of that is about the cameras. It is about decisions that were never made before the quote. This checklist walks through those decisions so you can compare proposals properly and end up with something that works.

How to use this document

Work through sections 1 to 3 before you talk to anybody. They are business decisions, not technical ones, and they determine almost everything about the quote you will receive.

Take sections 4 to 8 into the conversation with installers. Asking the same questions of each one is what makes proposals comparable.

A completed copy describes your building, your coverage, and your gaps. Store it accordingly.

The words you will hear, and what they actually mean

Pixel density (pixels per foot)

How much detail lands on the part of the scene you care about. A camera does not have one quality; it has a quality at a distance. This is the number that decides whether you get a face or a shape, and it is the question most quotes never mention.

Field of view

How wide an area one camera sees. Widen it and pixel density falls, because the same detail is spread over more ground. This is why one camera cannot both watch the lot and identify the driver.

NVR and VMS

The network video recorder is the box that stores footage. The video management software is what you use to search and export it. The filing cabinet and the filing system.

PoE (Power over Ethernet)

Power and data down one cable, so a camera on a ceiling does not also need an outlet up there.

Retention period

How far back your footage goes before it is overwritten. It is set by storage, and it is almost always shorter than people assume.

IR illumination

The invisible light most cameras use at night, producing a black and white image. Useful for shapes and movement, no help at all for the color of a car.



1 What Do You Want It to Do?

Be specific. 'Security' is not a requirement. These are the purposes that actually change the design, and they conflict with each other more often than people expect.

- ☐ Identify a person well enough to recognize or prosecute them.
This is the most demanding purpose and the one people assume they are getting. It needs tight framing at specific points, not wide views.
- ☐ See what happened in general terms, across an area.
- ☐ Read a license plate.
- ☐ Settle disputes about deliveries, damage, or what was said at a counter.
- ☐ Watch a specific risk: a cash point, a store room, a loading dock, a controlled area.
- ☐ Reassure staff or the public that an area is monitored.
- ☐ Satisfy an insurer, a regulator, a license condition, or a contract.
- ☐ Control who can open which doors, and know afterwards who did.
Access control and cameras are different systems solving different problems. Many organizations need both and only budget for one.

The conflict nobody mentions

A camera that covers a whole parking lot cannot also identify a face at the door. Wide coverage and identification are opposing requirements, and you generally solve them with different cameras in different places rather than with one better camera. Deciding which points need identification is the single most useful thing you can do before getting a quote.



2 Where, Specifically

Walk the site with a floor plan. Mark each point and write what it is for.

Location	What we need to see there	Identify or overview?	Doors to control?

■ Prompts, including the ones people forget

- ☐ Every exterior door, including the ones staff use and the ones nobody uses.
- ☐ The main entrance, at a height and angle that shows faces rather than the tops of heads.
- ☐ Reception, counters, and anywhere money or medication changes hands.
- ☐ Loading docks, delivery areas, and rear yards.
- ☐ Parking areas, and the entrance and exit points specifically.
- ☐ Server or equipment rooms, and records storage.
- ☐ Areas where you must not record.
Restrooms, changing areas, and anywhere with a clear expectation of privacy. Write these down as deliberately as the areas you are covering.
- ☐ Anywhere an incident has already happened. Recent history is the best guide there is.

3 How Long Do You Need to Keep It?

Retention drives storage, and storage drives a large share of the cost. It is also the thing most often set too low by default and only discovered when somebody asks for old footage.

- ☐ How long before you would typically learn about an incident?
Vandalism is noticed the next morning. A dispute over a delivery might surface in six weeks. Set retention against the slowest realistic case.



☐ Does an insurer, regulator, license, or contract require a particular period?

☐ For public bodies, do records retention rules apply to the footage?

Recordings may be records, and may be subject to retention schedules and public records requests. Confirm this before it comes up.

☐ Do you need longer retention for some cameras than others?

☐ Do you need a way to save particular footage before it is overwritten?

Retention we need, in days

Any area needing longer

Driven by

4

The Practical Constraints

☐ Is there network cable where each camera and reader needs to go, or does it need running?

Cabling is usually the largest single line in the quote, and it is much cheaper before walls are finished.

☐ Is there power where it is needed, and is the recorder on battery backup?

☐ What are the lighting conditions at each point, including at night and looking into the sun?

A camera pointed at a bright doorway from inside will show you a silhouette and nothing else.

☐ Is anything outdoors, and what weather does it have to survive?

☐ Will anything be reachable from the ground, and does it need protecting?

☐ Where will the recorder live, and can that space be locked and kept cool?

☐ Will these systems share your business network, or run separately?

Camera and door equipment is rarely updated and should generally be kept away from your business systems.

☐ Does the system need internet access, and what happens to it if the internet is down?

☐ Does the landlord need to approve mounting, drilling, or cable runs?

5

Doors and Who Opens Them

☐ Which doors need controlling, and which are fine with keys.

☐ Whether different people need access at different times of day.

☐ What happens to the doors in a power failure, and what the fire code requires there.

☐ Whether you need a record of who opened what and when.

This is often the real reason for access control, and it should be stated as a requirement rather than assumed.

☐ How access is granted to a new hire and removed from someone who leaves, and who does it.



- ☐ How you would handle somebody losing a fob or a card.
- ☐ Whether visitors, contractors, or cleaners need any kind of access.
- ☐ Whether it needs to integrate with your alarm, your intercom, or your camera system.

6 Who Can Watch, and Who Decides

- ☐ Who is allowed to view live footage, and from where.
- ☐ Who is allowed to review recorded footage, and does anybody have to approve it.
- ☐ Who can export a clip, and is there a record of exports.
- ☐ More than one person knows how to do all of the above.
Systems where one person holds all the knowledge stop being useful the week that person is on vacation.
- ☐ How a request from law enforcement or an attorney would be handled.
- ☐ Whether staff have been told what is recorded and why.
- ☐ Whether signage is in place, and whether anything in your jurisdiction requires it.
- ☐ Whether audio is being recorded anywhere.
Recording audio carries different and stricter legal considerations than recording video. Do not switch it on casually.

7 Questions to Ask Every Installer

- ☐ What exactly is included, down to cabling, mounting, power, and configuration?
- ☐ What retention does this design give at the quoted quality, and what happens if we want longer?
- ☐ Show me actual footage from this equipment at this distance, at night.
- ☐ Who owns the system and the recordings, and are the administrator accounts in our name?
- ☐ Is there an ongoing subscription, and what stops working if we stop paying?
Ask this explicitly. Some systems become inert without an active subscription.
- ☐ How does it get software updates, and for how long will those be available?
- ☐ Can it be expanded later, and what does adding a camera actually cost?
- ☐ What happens when a camera fails, and what is the warranty?
- ☐ Who supports it afterwards, and what are the response times?
- ☐ If federal money or a federal contract is involved, is the equipment clear of Section 889?
Section 889 of the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act restricts certain named manufacturers of video surveillance and telecommunications equipment. It applies to federal agencies, to federal contractors, and, through 2 CFR 200.216, to equipment bought with federal grant or loan funds. It does not automatically apply to a purchase made with your own money, so establish which situation you are in first, then ask for the manufacturer's written statement. The FCC publishes the covered list.



- ☐ Does Michigan licensing apply to this work, and can you show me yours?

Michigan licenses security alarm system contractors under the Private Security Business and Security Alarm Act (1968 PA 330, MCL 338.1052), administered by LARA. Whether it reaches a particular camera or access control job depends on what is being installed and whether it is monitored, so ask the question rather than assuming either way.

8 Project Record

Site

Cameras planned

Doors to be controlled

Retention required

Budget

Installer selected

Licensing confirmed (if applicable)

Completed by and date

About this checklist

This is general planning guidance, not legal advice. Recording people, recording audio, signage, retention, employee notification, and responding to requests for footage all carry legal considerations that vary by situation and by jurisdiction, and public bodies have additional records obligations. Michigan licenses security alarm system contractors under 1968 PA 330 (MCL 338.1052) through LARA, and whether that licensing reaches a particular installation depends on the system involved. Federal restrictions under Section 889 apply to federal procurement, federal contractors, and federally funded purchases rather than to every purchase by every public body. Confirm your own requirements with legal counsel and, for public organizations, with your attorney and records officer.

Planning cameras or door access?

Computer Ties designs, installs, and supports commercial camera and access control systems across southern Michigan, including for townships, police and fire departments, and other public organizations with specific equipment requirements. We will walk your site, tell you what each position can realistically deliver, and give you a design you can compare against anything else you are quoted.

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