CCTV and Webcams Panopticon or Genius Marketing?

We are probably all familiar with the term CCTV but not all of us may have considered using closed circuit television within our profession. You may initially think of CCTV in a negative light from Orwell’s ‘Big Brother is Watching’, Panopticon, or you may see it as an additional tool to enhance the safety of society, individuals within society, your environment, the animals in your care and your business. There is no doubt that the use of CCTV may suggest a threat to a person’s right of privacy and that installing equipment in your place of business may appear to enhance authoritarian leadership styles, but there may be justifiable cause. CCTV also raises the question of your ethics and morals but there needs to be consideration of everyone’s perspective. Research figures produced from the inception of CCTV have repeatedly demonstrated that ‘it’s’ presence is more than likely to reduce crime and therefore the cost of installation could be offset by the reduced loss to a business that is being repeatedly targeted. So, from a business perspective, let’s bring it on!

However, there is also a need to understand where loss occurs to plan effective installation of CCTV. Is it from small minorities within society shoplifting from your reception or sales area? Is a member of your staff or a student abusing their position by fiddling the till or helping themselves to animal feed or equipment? or workers not turning up when they should or staff selling trade secrets? Loss can also occur from damage carried out to your property, burglary or an attempt to steal animals in your care. In all instances CCTV can be an ‘overt’ way to deter loss. From the criminal’s point of view knowing that CCTV is installed is likely to reduce their behaviour as they will have to find an alternative approach or target another location! From a management point of view, CCTV monitoring of staff can also help plan staff resources, improve performance and increase profit.

Just the thought of CCTV used against crime will bring about both negative and positive thoughts but what about considering other options, like promoting animal welfare, sharing positive and valued information or promoting your business? You may be aware of the 2015 short report by the Farm Animal Welfare Committee reviewing the need for CCTV at the point of stunning and slaughter as a way of recording and verifying compliance within animal welfare, well this in one example which in my view is positive. As an animal welfare lobbyist, I am certainly in favour of installing CCTV, with only minor regard to the ethical and legal aspects of monitoring workers remotely, all being that this is broadcast within a closed network. In fact, I believe that CCTV should be installed to bring about compliance and more awareness in many animal related industries including dog grooming parlours, dog training, behaviour clinics, pet shops, boarding kennels, doggy day centres, animal breeders, zoos, veterinary centres and animal welfare centres. I understand the financial implications and how challenging this would be and I can probably hear the gasp of astonishment from some of you, with the thought you would be ‘filmed’ carrying out your job role, but why not? If you are good at what you do, demonstrate compassion and welfare then ‘show off’ and broadcast. Does my desire to install CCTV make me authoritarian by limiting individual and political freedom - No. Does it offer the chance to improve welfare, promote deserving businesses and provide useful information to help others - Yes!

Of course, this is just my opinion.

So, if CCTV is a closed circuit, how do you get your message out to the big wide world? Well you could consider introducing webcams and live streaming for your business. Operating a live webcam that gives you a chance to showcases your business can boost sales and generate more online bookings. Evidence suggests that web site traffic increases by 3 to 4 times where video streaming is active. In theory this is not too difficult to achieve, especially as many of you already demonstrate social media skills and there are companies dedicated to providing the technology, service and support to help business improve their visibility on the web. Having live or frequently changing video clips about your business, your methods or your staff team are likely to encourage repeat visitors to your web and social media sites.

Amazingly you can watch live web cams from all over the world, in the comfort of your arm chair. Web sites like EarthCam and WorldCam, offer a directory of livecams streaming from Universities, town centres, wildlife centres, pubs and clubs in fact most things you can imagine, there are also live cams covering ‘under the microscope’, just in case it’s raining and you have no work to do, but be cautious when searching for live cams or streaming web pages, as there are likely to be some surprises, for adults only! Once you have set up your live cam you can add your listing and business details onto one of the main Earth Cam directories or can link with your local town live cam. When you have achieved your link, you will likely boost your search rankings on the major search engines and the higher you achieve your ranking, the more visitors you will attract to your web site and potentially this should increase your sales. Genius marketing plan comes to mind.

Be cautious with what equipment you choose to avoid technical mind fields, what your intentions are for using CCTV, where you are going to site your cameras and who is likely to be filmed or visible. If you are using or intend to use CCTV or other forms of closed or open broadcasting then you need to register your actions with the Information Commissioner’s Office. This is because ‘surveillance’ is covered within the Data Protection Act and there are strict codes of conduct to follow.