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On Camera

Cameras on construction sites bring a sharp focus to jobsite productivity and help developers avoid mistakes and delays.

Randall Shearin

BJ's Wholesale Club Inc. decided in 2014 to begin using construction cameras at jobsites where the company builds new stores and fuel stations. BJ's was not looking to address a specific issue or problem, however. Rather, the company was paying heed to a timeless proverb: knowledge is power.

"We simply wanted to know more about what was actually going on at our jobsites," says Lloyd Lords, BJ's assistant vice president and manager of construction. "There are always issues on sites, or sometimes it's the lack of information." This lack of information can range from conditions and processes, to other jobsite factors that can affect successful project execution. "A picture is worth a thousand words," Lords believes.

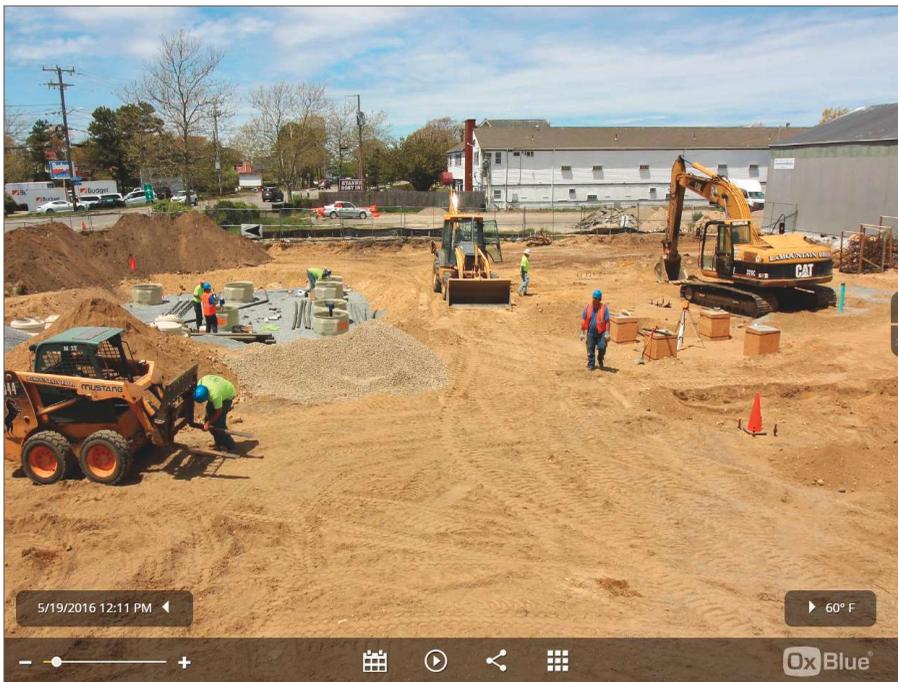
The Westborough, Massachusetts-based company develops and operates member warehouse clubs in 15 East Coast states from Maine to Florida. At any one time, the company may have several projects under construction, including new and repurposed warehouse buildings and fuel station sites. These projects involve dozens of contractors and subcontractors at jobsites from three to six months, on average.

ACCESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Providing readily accessible, real-time pictures of project activity and productivity, the construction cameras augment standard project-status reports and help BJ's meet the ongoing challenge confronting all retailers that are in market expansion mode: keeping store openings on schedule and within budget.

BJ's had used construction cameras in the past but only for roofing projects, never for monitoring and helping to manage entire jobsites, Lords says.

The company considered a number of construction camera providers, compar-



BJ's Wholesale Club Inc. uses OxBlue cameras on construction sites to keep an eye on jobsite productivity, and to avoid costly mistakes and delays.

ing system features, commitment to customer support, ease of implementation and, of course, the additional expenses of equipping jobsites with cameras. "Cost is always a consideration, but it is not the ultimate deciding factor," says Lords. "We look at the total cost of doing business."

BJ's chose Atlanta-based OxBlue Corporation, a 15-year-old global construction camera service provider. OxBlue offers fixed position and pan-tilt-zoom (PTZ) cameras, as well as a wide range of solar products designed to power OxBlue camera systems, which provide high-resolution images, high-definition time-lapse movies and a user-friendly web-cam interface.

"BJ's shares with us its site plans and other critical project details, which allows us to map out camera placement coverages that are tailored to their unique needs,"

says J. P. Schaaf, OxBlue account executive. For each project, a full survey of the site and of the client's objectives leads to camera placement recommendations that provide not only the best daily views, but also powerful, time-lapse videos at the end of the project.

BJ's uses cameras to capture ground-up construction of warehouse clubs and fuel centers, as well as to monitor interior build-outs. The cameras have built-in cellular technology for easy wireless deployment. From the first day of construction until grand opening day, the cameras observe virtually all activity and document key milestones, including pad preparation; building erection and roof completion; electrical, HVAC and plumbing installation; signage placement, fixture assembly and installation and shelf stocking.

This is in line with the level of detail and communication retailers require to avoid costly delays, while finding ways to open the doors for business and begin generating revenue. Scheduling of electrical, lighting, flooring and other interior work in the later project stages often flows more smoothly – and work progresses more quickly – when clients can observe what’s going on each day.

The contract between BJ’s and OxBlue also includes technical and logistical phone support, including proactive monitoring throughout the lifecycle of each project.

“OxBlue was not the cheapest provider we looked at,” says Lords, “but we liked OxBlue’s versatility and the web-based platform that lets us access time-lapse images on our computers and our mobile devices.”

EASE OF INTEGRATION

Integrating the cameras did not require employee training or the purchase of additional software, Lords said. OxBlue’s system linked seamlessly with the company’s project management software, providing BJ’s with “a simple tool that we know how to use to our advantage,” he explained.

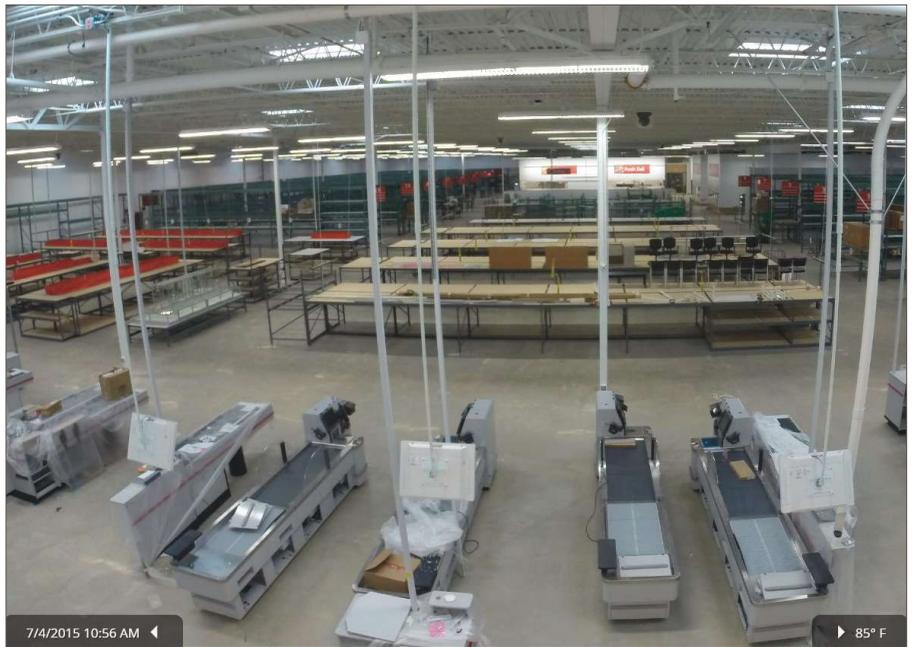
With the company’s ability to select specific images, pan and zoom and play high-definition time-lapse movies, BJ’s is able to remotely monitor and document its construction projects, viewing them from big-picture perspectives or pinpointing the smallest details on jobs.

Lords cites the cameras’ capabilities to help the company avoid and resolve jobsite disputes. For example, a contractor cannot claim to have 50 workers on a site when the cameras can clearly prove otherwise. Also, disagreements over workdays or work hours lost to rain delays, muddy conditions or other inclement weather can be settled at once by a review of time-lapse jobsite pictures.

The camera systems can also help with identifying overlooked hazards, risk factors and performance issues before they get out hand. At one jobsite, “during installation of the petroleum fuel tanks, one of our engineers noticed that a tank was being installed incorrectly,” says Lords. “We were able to catch it while it was happening and contact the jobsite imme-



Through the company’s use of jobsite cameras, BJ’s was able to save thousands of dollars by catching workers before a petroleum fuel tank was installed incorrectly.



Worksite cameras have helped BJ’s avoid and resolve jobsite disputes — ranging from contractors claiming an incorrect number of workers onsite, to disagreements over work hours lost to rain delays.

diately. That was an issue involving thousands of dollars, and we were able to stop it before it happened.”

For BJ’s, the experience of contracting for and deploying jobsite construction camera services has been a positive one. Says Lords: “It’s a simple service, a good

tool and we know what we’re getting” — both from the construction camera service provider and from contractors at jobsites. **SCB**