

# Mobile Surveillance Unit Buyer's Guide

Insights and Questions to Help You  
Make an Informed Decision



**LMT**



# Why Crime Feels Worse Than Ever—Even When It's Not

*There is nearly 5x the amount of property crime as violent crime in the U.S. but viewers see them covered almost equally.*

—PEW RESEARCH

Crime is more visible than ever thanks to the combination of smart phones and social media. It is easy to find videos of attacks, thefts, vandalisms, and more. That's why there is growing unease for business and property owners who want to protect their employees, customers, and property.

In 23 of 27 Gallup Polls since 1993, 60% of Americans have said there was an increase in crime in the United States.<sup>1</sup> But has crime increased? According to the FBI, there has been a decrease in several areas of violent crime.<sup>2</sup> So why does it feel like it has actually increased?

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**IN 2023 THERE WERE:**

**884,550**

reports of  
aggravated assaults

**19,252**

cases of murder and  
nonnegligent manslaughter

**1,218,467**

incidents of violent crime

**222,795**

reports of robbery<sup>8</sup>

While many reports show that crime has decreased significantly since the 1990s, it is more visible and more widely covered. According to Pew Research, 77% of American adults are regularly seeing local media coverage of crime.<sup>3</sup> Except for weather, that is more than any other topic including traffic, sports, government and politics, and arts and culture. Pew Research also notes that while there is nearly five times the amount of property crime as violent crime in the United States, viewers see them covered almost equally.

There is also a correlation between how much crime coverage Americans see and their perception of it affecting them or their families.

Clearly, even though crime hasn't risen, the perception of crime has a direct impact on the American people and their communities.

Part of that perception can be impacted by criminals' adaptability. While the actual crime (assault, vandalism, etc.) stays the same, their methods are

changing in an attempt to stay ahead of law enforcement. For example, many criminals are shifting to more technology-focused versions of drug trafficking and money laundering. And as criminals find new, sensational methods of crimes it will naturally lead to more attention in the local media and on social media. Examples of this can be seen in recent footage of organized retail crime gangs sweeping through stores and grabbing as much as they can.

As crime continues to evolve and adapt to new technologies, the strategies used to combat it also need to change. Business and property owners can no longer rely solely on traditional security measures—they need proactive solutions that address both actual crime and the growing perception of it. This is where modern security technology, including mobile surveillance units, plays a crucial role.

## CONCERN ABOUT CRIME

Among Americans Who View Local Crime News:



**33%**

of those who watch often are extremely or very concerned.



**19%**

of those who watch sometimes are concerned.



**10%**

of those who rarely or never watch are concerned.<sup>9</sup>

—PEW RESEARCH

**\$15–\$35 BILLION**

estimated annual impact of cargo theft.<sup>12,13</sup>

**\$1 BILLION**

in annual losses due to construction theft<sup>11</sup>

**\$121.6 BILLION**

in annual retail theft across the country

**\$4 MILLION**

to clean up illegal dumping in Camden, NJ per year

**\$10 MILLION**

to clean up illegal dumping in San Francisco, CA annually

**\$12 BILLION**

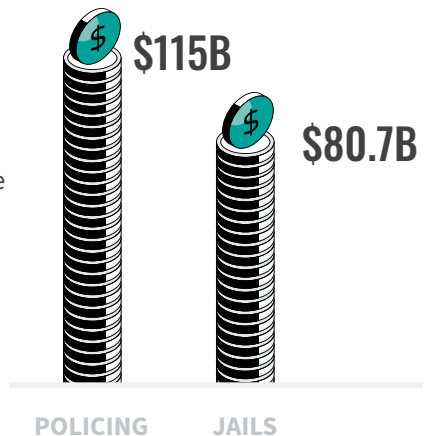
to clean up graffiti nationally per year<sup>10</sup>



## Crime's Burden on Communities: Rising Costs and Fading Trust

One aspect of crime that isn't broadcast as loudly is its costs. There are direct costs associated with crime including law enforcement, prosecutions, and prison systems. Policing alone costs more than \$115 billion in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Public and private jail systems cost the country an estimated \$80.7 billion on top of that.<sup>5</sup>

Another consequence of crime is its impact on the perception of safety, employee morale, and a business's reputation. These indirect costs can hurt a business or community just as much as the direct ones. No one wants to spend their time, either as a consumer or as an employee, in a place they don't feel safe. A perpetual crime problem can quickly ruin the reputation of a business or community that they may have spent years building. Crime not only hurts financially, but it is also a morale killer for businesses, communities, governments, and even the end consumer.



# Crime Prevention Tactics: What Works and What Falls Short

Security cameras, guards, and police presence are traditional responses to crime, but each has pros and cons. Security cameras are passive measures and only help after the fact. They also have a range of costs and capabilities. Security guards and police officers offer a high deterrent factor, but they are human. They need breaks, take days off, and can miss things. Also, 78% of law enforcement agencies are struggling with recruitment.<sup>6</sup>



## SECURITY GUARDS

### PROS

- » Higher deterrent factor
- » Added eyes on the ground
- » Can be highly trained (ex-military or law enforcement)

### CONS

- » Human and fallible
- » Takes sick days and vacation days
- » Expensive, ranging from \$20 to \$60+ per hour<sup>7</sup>



## POLICE OFFICERS

### PROS

- » Highest deterrence factor
- » Armed and highly trained

### CONS

- » Human and fallible
- » Have other priorities
- » Adds strain to already thin police forces



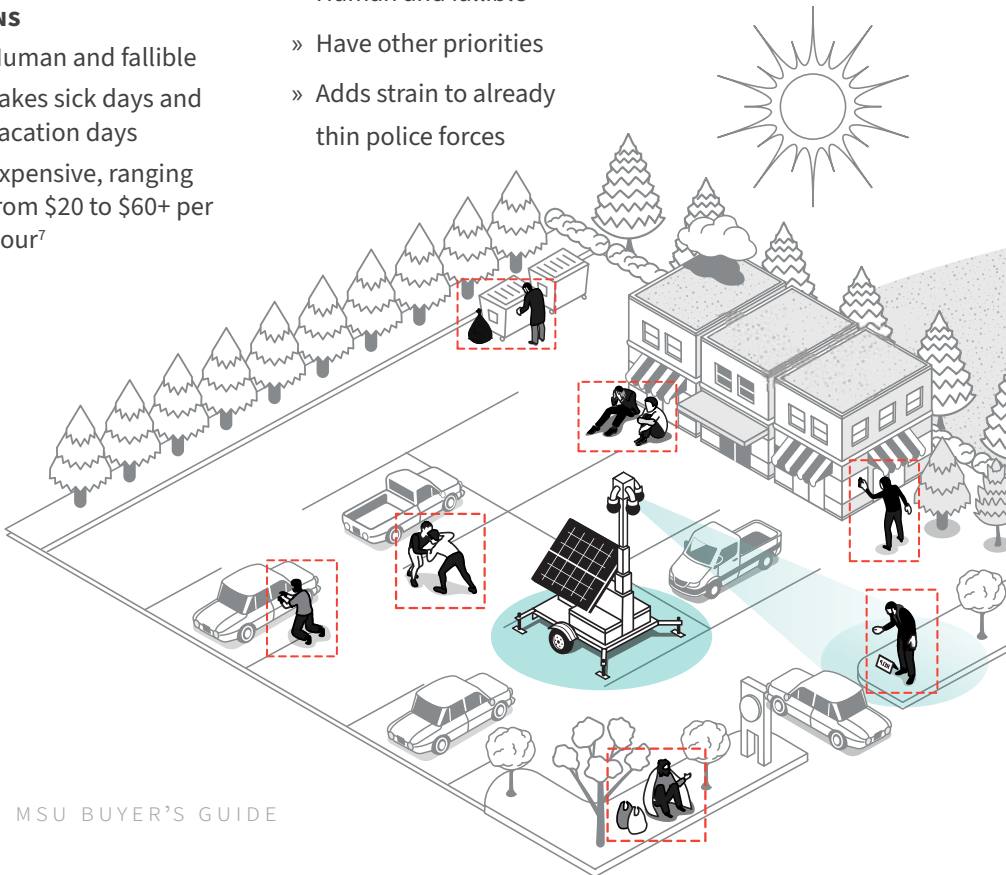
## SECURITY CAMERAS

### PROS

- » Collects evidence
- » Irrefutable witness


### CONS

- » Low deterrence factor
- » Criminals desensitized





## The Power of Mobility: Why MSUs Are Changing Security




For many businesses, mobile surveillance units (MSUs) are a solution to several of these issues. MSUs are self-contained, portable security systems that provide real-time monitoring and deterrence. Typically, these units are used in areas where it is difficult or impractical to install traditional security cameras because of limited infrastructure. Each solution provider's MSU will have slightly different capabilities, but they can include high-resolution cameras, motion sensors, lights, alarms, night vision capabilities, and more.

A key to MSUs is their mobility. Because they don't rely on hardwired connections, they can help secure any outdoor environment, including parking lots, construction sites, events, critical infrastructure, emergency response situations, and more. Their mobility also allows for rapid deployment and repositioning as security needs change at each of these locations.

MSUs can offer a cost-effective alternative to on-site security personnel, providing 24/7 monitoring, live video streaming, and even AI-driven analytics to detect suspicious activity and autonomously deter criminals with lights and audible warnings.





# Not All MSUs Are Created Equal

## Key Questions to Ask Vendors

You may have even seen MSUs in parking lots, at events, or around your community. But what sets one system apart from another? Since this is a newer solution, many vendors are unproven and this isn't an area you can afford to get wrong. If an event is missed or evidence is lost, it could cost you thousands at the very least. But what if an employee or customer is injured or attacked? With the wrong MSU, you could miss vital information that could ruin your business.

This guide will walk you through what you need to know when evaluating an MSU, covering reliability, security, scale, data intelligence, and ability to integrate with different systems and streamline your workflows. It will also give you some questions to ask vendors when evaluating different solutions.



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# Reliability

Crime never sleeps, so you should expect your MSU to work reliably. Vendors may have differing definitions around what it means to be reliable, so you should ask careful questions during your evaluation process. Make sure to cover what customer support the vendors offer, their connectivity options, and how the vendor ensures the health and security of your units.

## Uptime

- ☐ How is uptime defined? Is every component part (such as each LED bulb) of the solution considered in this calculation, or can an aspect of the solution be down, but the overall solution still be considered “up” and running in their eyes?
- ☐ Is there a regional uptime, especially in areas where there is limited sun exposure?
- ☐ Across how many units are they measuring uptime? Some vendors have tens of thousands of fielded units and have statistically significant numbers, while others measure uptime across a limited set of favorable installations.
- ☐ Does the vendor perform extensive burn-in on every component to mitigate early failures in the field?

## Connectivity

- ☐ Reliability requires a stable data connection regardless of surrounding cellular congestion. Does the vendor offer multi-carrier, multi-SIM connectivity with seamless network failover (e.g. AT&T to Verizon) so no data is lost?
- ☐ Does the vendor have guaranteed bandwidth with at least three cellular providers?

## Physical Unit Security

- ☐ What type of locks and tamper-proof measures are offered to protect the unit? How is the unit secured?
- ☐ Are the batteries, generators, and other important equipment protected by locks? How do you access them? Do you need a physical key or is there a way to remotely unlock them?
- ☐ Are cables exposed or otherwise susceptible to wire cutters?
- ☐ Does the solution offer any way of tracking or monitoring if someone may be about to damage or tamper with the unit?
- ☐ If the unit is stolen, is there a self-powered tracking device to assist in recovery?

## Unit Health and Recovery

- ☐ Does the solution pre-emptively monitor all components for approaching failure conditions (e.g. known power draw variations, slew delays, etc.)?
- ☐ Does the solution offer a way of reporting on the health of its components?
- ☐ Can the system take corrective measures to self-heal without human intervention?
- ☐ When components do need replacing, does the new component automatically assume the identity and settings of the replaced component—eliminating manual configuration to bring the component online?

## Customer Support

- ☐ Does the vendor offer 24/7 in-house, U.S.-based support?

## Insurance

- ☐ Is insurance included against acts of God, theft, or vandalism?

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## Cybersecurity

Even physical security solutions can be vulnerable to cybersecurity threats. What does the vendor do to mitigate such threats?

### Connectivity

- ☐ Does your data ever hit a public network? Or does the vendor exclusively operate on a private network?
- ☐ Is the data ever sent unencrypted on public networks?
- ☐ Are devices accessible through a public internet connection?

### Certifications

- ☐ What type of certifications does the vendor have?
- ☐ Do they have SOC2 Type 2 certification?
- ☐ What about ISO 9001?

### Encryption

- ☐ Is all customer data protected with AES-256 encryption at rest and TLS 1.2 during transit, ensuring confidentiality?
- ☐ Are all AI algorithms applied to your data hosted on private infrastructure to ensure confidentiality and data privacy?

### Governance

- ☐ Does the vendor offer RBAC, letting you control who can access your system and what data and features each person is able to access?
- ☐ Does the system allow you to designate rights to users by site, organization, and role?

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## Scale

For you to successfully leverage an MSU at scale, it must be frictionless to deploy, manage, adjust, and update the solution. Vendors should have a proven track record of delivering on time and managing different numbers of units, from a few dozen to thousands of units.

### Rapidly Deployable

- ☐ On average, how long does it take for a vendor to roll out an MSU to a new customer?
- ☐ Can the units be rolled out in a flexible fashion? Can they be financed with expense dollars and not capital funding?
- ☐ Does the vendor have units and spare parts in inventory in warehouses across the country?
- ☐ Could you get a unit within a week? And how many units could you get?

### Maintenance

- ☐ Is maintenance covered by the vendor?
- ☐ Does the vendor have a network of certified technicians that can complete the maintenance and repairs regardless of region? Are they in your area?
- ☐ If a camera goes down, are you responsible for fixing it?

### Fleet Management

- ☐ Does the vendor offer the ability to remotely access, manage, and mass update any number of units?

### Credibility

- ☐ Where are the units made?
- ☐ How many units does the vendor have in the field today?
- ☐ How many of the Fortune 500 use their units?
- ☐ How many MSU-related patents does the vendor have?

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## Automated Detection and Deterrence

Unlike many other video systems, your MSUs should provide intelligence in near real time, making you aware of threat activity that may require immediate action. To do this, you need to find a vendor with a product vision centered on AI for automating manual tasks, reducing noisy alerts, and deterring bad actors without human intervention. This requires the vendor to have an integrated tech stack and ability to control the entire data pipeline.

### Detections

- ☐ Can the vendor's units detect threats in near real time?
- ☐ Identifying a human or vehicle and sending an alert is not enough. An MSU should help detect intent and other indications of something going wrong. Given this, what type of behavior or attributes can the MSU detect? Consider detections like:
  - » Crowd formation
  - » PPE compliance
  - » Temperature
  - » Car attributes
  - » Human attributes
- ☐ Can the vendor validate the context of an event and prioritize events/determine which ones require human intervention?
- ☐ Can the vendor offer custom profiles based on the monitored location's hours of operation or activity?

### Deterrents

- ☐ Does the vendor offer ways to adjust strobe color or pattern?
- ☐ What type of spotlight/floodlight is available?
- ☐ What talk downs (prerecorded, live operator, AI-generated) are available?
- ☐ Can the vendor generate an automated talk down based on its ability to detect what someone is wearing? (e.g. "You in the red shirt, leave the premises!")
- ☐ Is there an option for employees to activate the MSU in a dedicated way when they feel unsafe leaving/entering the premises (i.e. a panic button)?

### AI

- ☐ Can the vendor speak to its product strategy/roadmap for AI?
- ☐ How is the vendor resourced to execute on this strategy? How large is its product and engineering team?
- ☐ Some vendors in the market are working toward an agentic AI vision where multi-step processes are automated, minimizing human involvement. Does the vendor consider itself a player in agentic AI? Why and how?

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## Streamlined Workflows and Integrations

You likely use many different systems and tools to ensure the safety and security of your workplace and people. The MSU you choose should offer you flexibility—a robust alert response and video management system with an open API that integrates seamlessly with your team's existing systems.

### Workflow

- ☐ Does the vendor offer a turnkey video management and alert response system?
- ☐ Does the vendor have relationships with third parties that provide managed alert response services if you can't manage alerts in house?
- ☐ Does the vendor and their alert response teams have specializations by vertical? Do they know what loitering and aggressive behavior looks like in a retail environment versus an industrial environment?
- ☐ Can you stream multiple cameras at once?
- ☐ Does the vendor provide reporting allowing you to review your organization's security events over a period of time?

### Integrations

- ☐ Is the vendor VMS-agnostic?
- ☐ Do they offer an open API? Do they charge for it?
- ☐ Which other platforms does the vendor have integrations with today?



# Making the Right MSU Choice

for Long-Term Security

Choosing the right mobile surveillance unit is critical for your security, budget, and operational success. It is a decision that you can't afford to get wrong. It is essential to dig deep and ask the right follow up questions to vendors, especially those who offer a "build-your-own" solution or make exaggerated claims. Be sure to ask about the MSU's durability, integrations, service support, and scalability. This will help you stay ahead of crime and will help you adapt as security challenges and technology evolve. By making an informed choice today, you position yourself for success, a high return on investment, and strong security at your business for years to come.

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