

With Ralph C. Jensen



More than Loss Prevention



Today's retail and distribution centers face a growing number of risks that make safeguarding employees and reducing shrink a challenge. These organizations often must balance security and loss prevention with their goal of maintaining an employee-friendly work environment that is free from discrimination and privacy concerns. For many retailers, archway metal detectors and hand wands are standard technologies; however, both only provide an audible beep whenever a metallic item is detected. This presents a challenge for loss prevention staff to identify the cause of the audible alarm. In the case of non-metal objects, the items will go completely undetected with these screening methods.

Recognizing a need for a new approach to LP and employee safety, ISCON Imaging is a company that strives to take some of the guesswork out of retail operations—offering an unconventional type of security through the delivery of a unique screening technology that is aimed at being both quick and private.

ISCON Imaging was built on a vision to provide safe, high-resolution, personnel scanners that quickly identify concealed items without using radiation or violating personal privacy. The company has patented its thermo-conductive technology that combines IR technology and heat transfer for screening that captures quality images without harmful ionizing radiation. Images show thermal imprints of concealed objects under clothing.

Other more invasive screening technologies are often associated with privacy and health-related issues—think of the images you've seen with backscatter X-ray, transmission X-ray and millimeter wave on your local news station. ISCON's technology avoids these issues altogether. Additionally, ISCON has the ability to provide real-time images that overcome the inefficiencies of “blind” technologies, such as walk-through metal detectors and hand wands.

What makes ISCON's technology so unique, and why it is being featured in this column, is that it not only detects risk but also helps prevent theft. Yes, you heard that correctly. In addition to its ability to detect contraband and potential threats, such as guns and knives (similar to what you'd find in an airport), it is also designed to identify merchandise concealed on a person. Detected products can be made from any type of material including: metals, plastics, powders, ceramics, gemstones, and even clothing.

A Whole New World

Here's how ISCON's technology works: Warm air is blown on a screening subject, then the high-resolution IR camera captures the image of the subject cooling. The clothing and any hidden objects cool at different rates. The operator of the screening technology will clearly see hidden objects through the contrast between

cooling profiles. Essentially, hidden objects are “imprinted” on the subject's clothing by differential cooling.

Since IR light doesn't pass through clothing, privacy issues are nonexistent, so employees won't be faced with the issues that airport screeners have struggled with. (Remember the “naked” TSA scans?) The key here is that clothing appears opaque to IR technology.

“Organizations today—whether they are a retail distribution center, a health-care facility or an airport—face a host of challenges from a threat and security standpoint,” said Bill Gately, CEO, ISCON Imaging. “This technology was created to help address the following key challenges: how to improve loss prevention and ensure employee safety while respecting an individual's privacy and avoiding the introduction of health concerns.”

There are two distinct platforms for this patented IR technology: SecureScan and FocusScan. SecureScan provides operators with whole-body scans that let them see objects concealed under clothing. It is a fully automated system that displays an image that is time and date stamped. FocusScan is a handheld platform that provides targeted screening in a portable and more convenient product. FocusScan features an embedded metal detector, so it can be used as a multi-mode integrated security system. Like SecureScan, the FocusScan also provides time- and date-stamped images.

An Evolving Supply Chain

ISCON's technology is particularly well-suited for distribution centers and retail warehouses, where a variety of merchandise passes through on a daily basis and where numerous employees work varying shifts. The driving force behind the growth of these centers is online purchasing, as brick-and-mortar locations harness the power of the Internet to reach a greater number of customers.

“Today, a significant amount of consumer purchasing is completed online and customers rely on these major distribution centers to deliver their purchases in-shape and on-time. But this growth comes with a cost—as distribution centers grow they require more employees, many of them being part-time or transitional. With employee theft at an all-time high, protecting merchandise that passes through a facility becomes just as important as security in storefronts,” Gately said.

Gately added that as a result of investments made in security technology, distribution centers experience a significant ROI, delivering protection to both employees and merchandise.

Preventing the Worst-Case Scenario

But, there's something beyond theft lurking in these locations.

“It's the 800-pound gorilla in the room that no one wants to talk about: workplace violence,” Gately said. “Many distribution centers don't screen employees as they walk in the door, but many are starting to rethink that strategy given the steady drumbeat of workplace violence reported in the news. And with ISCON's technology, companies can use the same screening techniques as employees walk in as when they walk out, avoiding discrimination issues since every employee can be required to participate.”

The concentration tends to be on the loss prevention side, which leaves this notion of workplace violence in the dark, but Gately says it's becoming a more prevalent issue as we as an industry and a country see more incidents come to light.

“Bottom line: Organizations need to be proactive and less reactive in today's environment,” Gately said. “Investing in technology that cannot only protect employees, but help better protect merchandise from potentially walking out the door, helps businesses significantly reduce liability exposure and gain a better ROI and maximize return.”

Ralph C. Jensen is the editor-in-chief of Security Products magazine.