

Top School Bus Camera Considerations

1 - How Long Do You Want Your Bus Video System To Last?

The obvious response should be “As long as the bus lasts”.

The problem is most school bus video systems are made with fragile hard drive based DVRs, and buses work in a very harsh mobile environment that the common hard drive are not well suited to survive in.

Think to yourself of every time you have heard of a hard drive problem, a hard drive crash from a friend or business colleague. Chances are those hard drives problems or hard drive crashes occurred while they were working on the PCs in a business office environment. Some may have been sitting still on a desktop or sitting safely under a desk and simply wore out or failed due to non-environmental affects. They are fragile mechanical devices that we trust to defend our school districts when in the worst possible scenarios events occur that require their use as a expert witness, often in court.

When you are purchasing a video system to protect your district from liability and act as an expert witness in the worst case scenarios, it seems a wise idea to make sure the one you invest district budget dollars into will not fail you when you need it most. This is the type of decision that separates those of vision and career advancement from those who might look back in hindsight after losing the lawsuit due to a failed hard drive system that was damaged in the crash.

Ask your IT department staff how many hard drives they have ever replaced from a fixed location in a controlled stabile environment. It has been my experience in a harsh mobile environment like a bus; the incidence of failure and problems will be geometrically higher. I have replaced far more hard drive based DVRs that I care to remember both under and out of warranty and the costs were considerable.

Most of us have several forms of solid state drive devices we use every day, in different locations we travel, in every environment and under conditions that would damage the average hard drive in about a week. That would be our cell phones, our MP3 players or IPods, GPS NAV systems, beepers or our Blackberries. With all the abuse we provide them the recording mechanism has no moving parts to wear out or break, so they are well suited for the mobile environment.

The only digital system I am aware of with any chance of exceeding the life of the average school bus is the solid-state drive based DVR.

With children's lives in your care and million dollar lawsuits on the line when something goes wrong, can you really afford to have anything less than 100% solid-state drive?

2 - Old Technology GPS Versus On Screen Mapping

In the past GPS was employed in bus video systems as a way to document the bus speed on the playback as several bus manufacturers had changed their wiring to multiplexed wiring or simply made it bothersome to tap into the speed signal.

Currently there are two methods to offer an improved GPS feature we call On Screen Mapping. Like the “Introduction to Business 101” example of IBM versus Bill Gates, one manufacturer has chosen to go the way of IBM who pursued the hardware based solutions, while Bill Gates blazed the software solutions. That reseller of Republic of China DVRs was the first to offer On Screen Mapping, a new technology application that deserves mention. Unfortunately like IBM this new feature was hardware driven through the incorporation of a large expensive mechanical solution that consumed one of the DVRs video channels. This meant the 4-channel DVR was only capable of recording 3 cameras when it had this mapping feature.

However it is an American DVR manufacturer who deserves recognition for taking notes in business school and learning the genius of Bill Gates software provided solutions providing this On Screen Mapping free of charge to all customers of their GPS equipped DVR systems. As their path to the same goal was via software not hardware like the most successful PC Software maker in history, not only can they deliver this to their GPS customers free of cost, they also do not require a large and expensive mechanical device that can consume a valuable video channel with mapping, so their 4 channel DVRs actually record 4 cameras full time even with mapping.

Document, verify or disprove a parent who claims that:

- The bus was too early and my child missed it.
- * The bus was too late, and my child missed it.
- * The bus did not stop at our stop,
- * My child got on the bus at school, but never got off.”
- * The bus was speeding past our house.

These parent claims can now be verified or proven false with On Screen Mapping and its GPS mapping on screen display.

Document, verify or disprove driver related concerns:

- o Did the driver stop at the 4 way stop signs,
- o Did the driver stay on route or wander all over the place?
- o Did the driver make personal trips in the bus?
- o Does the driver speed on certain roads?
- o Does the driver stop at a railroad crossing?
- o Was the bus used on weekends for unauthorized trips?
- o Where the bus is parked during the day and nights.

These driver concerns can now be verified or proven false with On Screen Mapping.

This system option requires no service connection or monthly fees from GPS satellite or cellular service provider. All that is required is a GPS equipped Safety Vision or FMI DVR to be played back on a PC that has access to high speed internet. It then connects to the Internet and provides the On Screen Mapping synchronized to the video footage from the cameras as the Meta data is attached to the video record.

3 - Conflict of Interest or Damaging To The US Economy

The worst conflict of interest in the school bus video market could be American schools using American tax payer funds to purchase China or Republic of China (Taiwan) DVRs under the false belief they were buying American made DVRs. Whether this was due to an oversight, mistake or they were misled intentionally by a reseller, in a time of recession with millions of lost American jobs, either way the damage is done.

Conflict of Interest or Damaging To The US Economy

- If American Schools were led to believe they were buying American made DVRs
- If American Schools expected high quality American DVRs and got China made DVRs
- If American Schools expected EPA compliant manufacturing that did not damage the environment.
- If American tax payer funds ended up supporting countries guilty of Religious persecution
- If American tax payer funds supported Chinas abysmal record of Human Rights abuses
- If American tax payer funds supported China workers at the cost of American jobs

Now is the time to Be Part of The Solution...Buy American Made DVRs

4 - System Warranty

The best warranty we know of for the complete system is 3 Years offered by true American manufacturers selling genuine American Made DVRs. When you purchase American made DVR based systems you have a built in advantage should you ever have programming or software related issues, you will not have to work around the 12 hour time zone issues as those who designed, built and programmed the DVRs are actually here in the USA!

5 - Memory Warranty

The best memory warranty we know of is the Limited Lifetime Warranty. All of our flash memory cards include a limited lifetime warranty provided. We provide this extended warranty to you at no charge. Your memory cards are warranted for life to be free from defects, and will be replaced if returned in good condition, without signs of; damage, tampering, abuse, if found defective for as long as the memory manufacturer continues to provide this product and were actively selling them in this market.

6- False Specifications & Fraud

Impressive esthetical features or specifications that salesmen insist are "must have items" are sometimes either of questionable value, misrepresentations or simply false. So many games are being played with product specifications regarding; "G" ratings, temperature rating, resolution and shock or vibration buffering that it might be possible those selling those products may be unaware they are misrepresenting their own products to your district.

While some may not be aware of their deceit, others have been informed by me and still choose not to correct their false specifications, bogus claims, so be warned.

Should you search for one claim in their literature (PDF) or on their web site you know to be false or misleading such as:

- Standard hard drive rated at over 3 "Gs"
- Hard drive operating temperature less than freezing without a heater
- Their cameras are waterproof
- Their cameras are vandal proof
- Vandal proof lock box

The above claims are my first clue, that at best, I may not be getting accurate or factual information on the product and at worst, I am being played for a fool by a deceptive person only interested in separating my school district from their budget funds. When I believe I am being deceived about those basic aspects of the products, I can only imagine other areas that I may not be getting full disclosure or at least being provided accurate information in good faith.

Should you suspect or realize that you are not being provided accurate and factual information in good faith, "Run don't walk" to the next product vender in the hope of an honest description of the product capabilities.

7 - Installation of Digital Bus Video Systems

Contrary to popular opinion these systems are simple to install for professional school bus trained service technicians. I have almost no reported incidence of them destroying their own district buses or our equipment as about 90% of customers have their shop technicians install the products to save the thousands in labor and high cost of travel from those who manufacturer and sell these systems.

However non-professional bus video companies with little or no proven track record of years of school bus installations have, through poor quality work, digital bus video system ignorance combined with vehicle unfamiliarity, seriously damaged buses and products making a costly investment in high tech legal liability worthless to the school district that purchased them.

By requesting installations you eliminate those best trained to work on your district buses...your own professional service technicians. While at the same time opening the door for some "Clown Squad" with no proven track record of 10+ years of bus video installations, to abuse, damage and violate the integrity of your buses and possibly damage and or render the warranty on the equipment they are installing unserviceable through their improper installations. Just because a manufacturer authorizes a dealer to sell and service a product, that does not mean that dealer has a sufficient level of skill or experience doing that to insure they do the job right the first time. Some manufacturers only qualification for dealer setup and authorization are they can fill out the form correctly and pass a credit check. The wrong time to find this out is after they have butchered your bus video installation.

Installation price is a direct measure of the value of the installer's skill level, experience in this industry and professionalism.

If you must have the systems installed by someone other than your district shop technicians, it is in the districts best interest to have your high tech legal liability protection installed by the most qualified and professional digital bus video installers available with a proven installation and service track record of at least 10 years in school bus video installs and service and at least 5 years in digital bus video system installation and service

Disclaimer In Good Faith

Do not expect an impartial and non-biased opinion in any of the above, as I sincerely believe school districts; deserve the best systems available for their tax dollars and those who push them to purchase short lived products should at least be honest enough to let them know before those school districts are burdened with considerable future expenses when those fragile hard drives wear out or crash.

The opinions expressed in the above documentation is based on decades of hands-on personal experience of the author in the mobile digital industry, problems seen firsthand, worked on with customers or manufacturers to remedy, based on customer complaints made to FMI, and extraneous influences.

These opinions are provided for relevant contextual perspective purposes only as opinion based reasons why we advocate the use of solid state drives to save school districts budget dollars and why we encourage those considering purchase of these systems to exercise jurisprudent and be aware those offering these systems to your district may not have your districts best interest in mind.

I strongly encourage all who sell these products to learn something about the application, installation and use of them before making claims about their function.

Just because something is written on your product PDFs or posted on a company web site, it is not always accurate or true. School districts deserve to be treated in good faith and phony claims knowingly sold to school districts and other government municipalities may constitute fraud.



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