

Whether they are growing, processing, manufacturing, distributing, or selling, businesses handling cannabis, and the cash exchanged for it, are highly vulnerable to theft. They deal with valuable products sold in thriving illicit markets, creating temptations some people with bad intentions might find hard to resist.

Consequently, [security is a vital issue at cannabis facilities](#). Potential burglars and employees with larceny in their hearts are most easily stopped through effective deterrence, which is the real purpose of most security innovations in the cannabis space.

Staying Secure Means Protecting Profits

Extensive visual surveillance is standard at all cannabis facilities. State-of-the-art surveillance cameras do far more than record light, sound, and movement, however.

The best security cameras include advanced detection equipment plus full analytic capabilities. They can detect sudden atmospheric changes, reference biometric data to identify individuals based on their facial characteristics, and send out immediate alerts if their functioning has been compromised or tampered with in any way.

Electronically controlled keycard or key fob entrance systems have been installed in virtually all cannabis operations, not just at primary entrance points (gates or front doors) but on doors that separate various rooms or sections in a facility. These systems come with information processing capabilities, so they can track the movements of facility workers throughout the day and alert security if any workers seem to be acting abnormally.

To save money on manpower, cannabis companies with security needs are increasingly turning to third-party operators who offer remote surveillance and monitoring services for a monthly or yearly fee. These monitoring services are online and watching 24 hours per day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, with surveillance responsibilities assigned to carefully trained professionals who are ready to respond to the slightest provocation.

Should anyone be caught in the act of thievery, that person will be audibly notified immediately that they've been caught and that their on-site supervisors and local police have both been contacted. With remote monitoring, on-site security guards are not hired and deployed, but the facility is just as safe and secure as if they were.

Electronic surveillance and digitalized access controls systems are vital links in any security chain. It would be a mistake, however, to become overly reliant on technology to keep cannabis operations safe from outside intruders. High-tech gadgetry has its place, but it's a poor substitute for time-tested physical security measures that can effectively prevent unwanted entrances in the vast majority of instances.

Strong fencing with razor wire, thick, impenetrable walls made from cinder block or steel-reinforced concrete, sturdily constructed entry gates, steel vaults to store products, and strong doors securely protected with commercial-grade locks are all vital elements of a cannabis business's security profile. Cannabis plants, extracts, and products are all potentially vulnerable

to theft, and redundant physical security measures that can keep invaders or interlopers out should be considered mandatory for cannabis enterprises that are serious about security.

While invasion for the purposes of theft is a concern that can't be ignored, the biggest security risk is undoubtedly presented by insiders with malicious intent. Petty pilfering by dishonest employees can have a cumulative effect, and with wholesale prices for recreational marijuana running in the \$1,000 to \$2,400 per pound range, financial losses from insider theft can be significant over time. It is here that electronic surveillance and access control can make their greatest impact since employees who are under scrutiny at all times would need to be incredibly clever to beat a system that monitors their every move and studiously records everything going on in their immediate vicinity.

Even with a firm commitment to physical security, the possibility of an invasion from the outside cannot be ignored. The most up-to-date alarm systems feature motion detection capabilities in addition to their normal sensitivities, adding another level of insurance against invaders.

To deal with possible daytime invasions, many cannabis businesses have installed panic buttons in various locations. Others have handed out mobile versions that can be worn around employees' wrists, or around their necks on a lanyard. A quick touch and the button will send out a silent signal to the police, guaranteeing rapid and reliable responses during any attempted robbery.

Meeting the Outdoor Challenge

Many of the methods used to create secure indoor environments won't work to protect outdoor fields, which aren't protected by walls or gates and may cover dozens of acres in some cases.

The normal method of securing outdoor growing operations is strong fencing wherever practical, combined with extensive camera deployments to provide full coverage of all sides of the field. On-site guards are necessary to monitor these cameras and respond to suspected intrusions since it can take too long for the police to arrive when growing is done outdoors in rural areas.

While their use is still in the preliminary stage, some outdoor growers are beginning to deploy [drones as a security supplement](#). Drones are controllable and can provide a birds-eye view of what is happening on the ground, and if incursions or invasions are observed or suspected, they can be deployed directly to a location to assess the circumstances more precisely. This could prevent employees or security guards from inadvertently wandering into dangerous situations, should it turn out that invaders are armed or present some other type of physical risk.

A Case Study: Surveillance Security in Action

One of the early winners in the rapidly-expanding cannabis security industry is a Gaithersburg, Maryland-based enterprise called [Surveillance Secure](#), which designs and installs large-scale, integrated security systems suitable for all levels of the cannabis ecosystem.

Recently, they were hired by a prominent, vertically integrated medical cannabis company, with growing and processing facilities in Maryland and Pennsylvania, that needed to scale up its security footprint after expanding its operations.

“Whenever a product changes hands or leaves the premises, it needs to be monitored,” [explains Will Biggerman](#), the Surveillance Secure Chief Operating Officer. “The client’s facility was operational 24/7, but less staff were there at night, so preventing theft during these off-peak hours was crucial with expanded security systems.”

Surveillance Secure mounted dozens of new cameras throughout this company’s facilities, to provide full 360-degree coverage of all growing-, manufacturing-, and transportation-related activities and locations. They also installed multiple new card readers and handed out numerous key fobs to employees, to ensure access to sensitive areas was properly restricted.

“We needed to ensure tiered access levels for the access control system,” says Biggerman. “We needed to program different access levels for different employees, as some were not given access to specific grow rooms, storerooms, and hallways. So really, access control customization was a big part of this process, to ensure authorized employees could easily access the areas they needed to, while others were prevented from entering sensitive areas.”

In response to Covid-19 regulations, they also added outdoor cameras to thoroughly cover customer pick-up areas. Customers who place orders online are required to add important verifying information, including their ID numbers and the make and model of their vehicles. That way, employees won’t be sent out carrying valuable products unless they are absolutely certain they’re delivering them to the right person.

Too Much or Too Little? Neither is the Preferable Option

The costs associated with high-level security are not a trivial matter. Technologically advanced security measures are priced appropriately, and vertically integrated enterprises with large-scale security needs might end up investing tens of thousands of dollars in order to get things done right. Smaller companies might get by spending less, but with their smaller profit margins security expenses can still be burdensome.

While it pays to be proactive, extravagance when installing security measures could represent a severe overreaction. The cost of security shouldn’t exceed the cost of repeated petty theft, which requires companies to perform a balancing act to keep their investments in security at a reasonable level.

Fortunately, security companies have customer consultants who work closely with cannabis businesses that are interested in purchasing their products, to make sure overkill is avoided. Good, sound security measures will pay for themselves many times over in the long run, which is why wise investments in this area should never be avoided.

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