With a focus on Illinois, Mike Janousek, Regional Sales Manager – Central Mid-West, Salient Systems outlines the landscape of cannabis security

Transforming *cannabis security* with intelligent video

The cannabis industry continues to accelerate through expansion into new markets, navigating shifting regulations and scaling operations across both retail and cultivation. With this growth comes rising pressure to meet increasingly complex compliance and security expectations. Highly regulated states, particularly those like Illinois, continue to influence how operators nationwide prepare for a more rigorous future.

Illinois has emerged as one of the most demanding cannabis markets in the country. As recreational use expanded in 2020, oversight increased significantly, prompting operators to adopt more sophisticated, adaptable security strategies. This shift has pushed the industry to think differently about risk, operational visibility and the role of intelligent video in maintaining compliance.

Why Illinois is leading the push

Illinois' regulatory environment has become a catalyst for innovation, requiring operators to elevate how they monitor facilities, secure high-value assets and document compliance. Increased auditing frequency, expanded video retention requirements, stricter access control rules and more detailed reporting expectations have made traditional surveillance strategies insufficient.

As these expectations evolve, they affect different types of cannabis

operations in distinct ways. Retail storefronts and cultivation facilities experience unique pressures and vulnerabilities, making it essential for security strategies to reflect the specific risks of each environment.

Retail versus cultivation

Retail storefronts and cultivation facilities face dramatically different risk profiles, operational workflows and regulatory expectations. As a result, each demands its own security approach, supported by technology designed to evolve as new requirements emerge.

High-value product, complex environments

Cultivation sites must balance asset protection with environmental oversight. With strict rules governing access, plant handling and operational consistency, surveillance is only part of the equation. Operators increasingly rely on intelligent video to track plant height, growth changes and placement, detect unauthorized access to crops, identify environmental anomalies and monitor space utilization and workflow patterns.

These capabilities help reduce the need for manual inspection and allow teams to respond more quickly to issues that threaten yield or compliance.

Cash-heavy, customer-facing, fast-moving

Retail cannabis locations face a unique blend of safety and compliance pressures. High cash flow, steady customer traffic and elevated product theft risk create a high-intensity environment that benefits from advanced analytics, including:

- Vaping and air-quality sensors for lobbies, restrooms and restricted spaces

- Tools to detect suspicious behavior or policy violations

- Solutions to identify burglary attempts or after-hours intrusion

- Shooter and threat detection

While both retail and cultivation facilities must adhere to strict retention, access control and auditing requirements, the way these standards manifest is vastly different. Operators must adapt in

real time as regulations evolve, camera coverage expands and technology expectations increase.

Meeting these changing requirements demands more than simply adding cameras; it requires smarter, more intuitive systems that support real-time decision-making and reduce the operational burden on staff. To stay compliant and efficient, cannabis operators are increasingly turning to intelligent video as a cornerstone of this modern, proactive approach.

Emerging technologies

As cannabis operations continue to scale, emerging technologies are expanding what intelligent video systems can achieve. Many operators are adopting cloud-enabled video platforms that simplify multi-site management, allowing teams to access footage, review analytics and support audits from anywhere. Cloud architectures also ensure systems remain current through automatic updates, critical in an environment where regulatory requirements may change with little notice.

> ## "To stay compliant and efficient, cannabis operators are increasingly turning to intelligent video."

AI-driven analytics are also playing an increasingly influential role. Beyond detecting motion or tampering, advanced systems can identify workflow inefficiencies, track queue lengths, recognize objects and analyze patterns that may signal security or operational risks. Heat mapping can show how employees and customers use space, while license plate recognition can support vendor management, deliveries or after-hours investigations.

These capabilities deepen operational insight while strengthening compliance, giving operators a clearer picture of both routine activity and anomalies. As these technologies mature, they will continue raising the bar for what cannabis security systems can deliver – extending far beyond traditional surveillance. ▸

How multi-site cannabis operators adapt

One Illinois-based multi-site cannabis operator offers a clear example of how regulatory pressure is driving security modernization. Managing both retail locations and large-scale cultivation facilities, the organization must stay ahead of some of the strictest retention, access control and restricted-area monitoring standards in the country. To support this dynamic environment, they work closely with regional integrators who help deploy, maintain and continuously adjust their systems.

Meeting expanding compliance requirements

As oversight intensified, the operator encountered new expectations that required them to:

- Add significant storage to support extended retention

- Increase camera coverage as workflows and compliance zones changed

- Upgrade cameras for improved clarity and analytic capabilities

- Enhance monitoring across both retail and cultivation environments

Evolving a once-simple deployment

Initially, the operator maintained a traditional system designed for basic compliance including recording, storage and monitoring. As incidents occurred and state requirements expanded, that approach became insufficient. The organization enhanced its deployment with more robust infrastructure and advanced analytics, enabling real-time detection, improved anomaly tracking and streamlined auditing.

A more scalable, intelligence-driven security model

This evolution mirrors a broader industry trend: compliance is no longer static. Multi-site operators feel regulatory changes first and most intensely due to their size, diverse facility types and audit frequency. As a result, they are emerging as early adopters of scalable, intelligent security platforms that can grow alongside regulatory expectations.

In many ways, these operators serve as a bellwether indicating where cannabis security is headed and what technologies will soon become standard across the market.

What's next

Looking ahead, the cannabis industry is poised for continued regulatory evolution. As more states legalize recreational use and federal conversations progress, expectations around monitoring, auditing and environmental oversight will only increase. Video will continue to move beyond passive capture, becoming a central source of operational intelligence.

Predictive analytics may soon help operators anticipate risks before they occur, whether identifying unusual plant-growth patterns that signal environmental issues or recognizing customer behavior that indicates potential theft. Integrations with seed-to-sale tracking platforms could further strengthen compliance by tying video analytics directly to product movement and inventory accuracy.

As the landscape grows more complex, operators that embrace intelligent video and integrated analytics early will be better positioned to scale efficiently, adapt quickly to new regulations and maintain a competitive edge in a highly regulated market.

"Retail storefronts and cultivation facilities face dramatically different risk profiles."

Final thoughts

As the cannabis industry evolves, the demands placed on operators especially in highly regulated states will continue to grow. Success now depends on the ability to integrate smarter technology, automate compliance and adapt to regulatory change with confidence.

The future of cannabis security will be defined by intelligent video analytics, operational and environmental monitoring, scalable and flexible security platforms and a proactive approach to compliance.

Organizations that invest in these capabilities will be best positioned to safeguard their operations, elevate efficiency and maintain compliance in an industry where expectations continue to rise. ■