



The VidMic: GIMMICK OR GOOD GEAR?

Cops, the TV show that brought “smile, you’re on candid camera” to law enforcement may soon be joined by, “say hello to my little friend!”

Testifying in court or in a deposition can be a tension-filled experience for even the most veteran officer. The VidMic was designed to bring real time surveillance to the eyes of the jury by adding still and action photography with sound to the clip-on radio routinely worn on an officer’s uniform. We wanted to know if this was a gimmick or a new technology that can help cops do their job and win more cases in court. According to Officer Rob Campbell of the Provo, Utah PD, “where the VidMic comes in handy is you can show the situation as you saw it and how you perceived it as an officer.

Then you can have the VidMic running so they can see the event as it transpired.” For every arrest in which Campbell was able to provide footage collected by a VidMic — the cases were plead out.

The rear of the unit shows an LCD monitor so when hand held you can frame still shots to record an accident or crime scene. Images produced by the 5.36 megapixel camera are reproduced in the jpeg format. For hands-free operation the unit is best worn in the center of the body rather than on the shoulder so the lens is in line with the eye. Be it compliance or a dangerous furtive movement, the camera sees what the officer sees.



NOT STAND ALONE

Some agencies asked if it would replace the patrol car-mounted dash cam. Selling for \$700 per unit compared with thousands of dollars for a dash cam makes this sound tempting. But most cops we spoke with liked having both cameras in play. The VidMic must be turned on manually but dash cams such as the Digital Ally are a seeing-eye that’s always on. Once the patrol car’s lights are turned on the hard drive is imprinted with what it saw beginning some 60 seconds prior. This makes the dash cam more reliable because in the heat of the moment officers have forgotten to activate the VidMic in time to record the action. Having it and not using it could be a liability. Imagine a line of questioning by a defense attorney: “Why didn’t you turn on your VidMic to record the arrest. Did you have something to hide?”

The camera function operates on a rechargeable lithium battery good for more than three hours of total recording time depending on whether the unit is used as a still camera or for motion pictures. Maximum run time is based on turning the VidMic on and off when needed. But, how often does a simple call such as marking an abandoned car turn into something else? Compared with a dash cam that automatically records past action, the VidMic is slower, needing up to seven seconds of warm-up before it's ready to record. The preferred option is to leave the VidMic on standby for instant recording. But, the standby mode drains energy from the battery and cuts down on run time. Fortunately an in-car charging unit comes with the VidMic. Should the internal battery run down, the radio function will remain operable and compatibility with radios currently in use includes the majority of units produced by Motorola, Kenwood and Vertex. The old sales tip of "never tell someone something you can show them," means officers will spend less time having to *explain*. At the end of a shift the one gig flash memory of each VidMic is downloaded via a USB port to department computers using VidMic software that is locked and secure. Once recorded, the images and sound cannot be erased. The camera cannot be rewind or reviewed prior to download. Officer Campbell reports pulling over a car because the driver was smoking what appeared to be a marijuana pipe. The stationary eye of the dash cam couldn't confirm this but upon searching the interior of the car while wearing the VidMic a smoking pipe was found lying on the seat next to the driver. The inability to manipulate the recording assured that the pipe had not been planted.

An ominous event captured by the VidMic showed officers responding to cries for help by a female coming from behind an apartment door. Forced entry revealed an older male raping a seven year old girl. Hoping to find a loop hole in the arrest the offender was set to enter a plea of not guilty. But, once his defense attorney viewed the tape the plea was changed to guilty. Video evidence recorded by VidMic not only saved the city time and money but additional trauma to the victim was avoided.

There may be not be a more powerful weapon on the side of justice than video evidence. This powerful weapon just got handier to use.



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