

Hallmarks of True Open Platform IP Video

In the security industry these days it has become almost embarrassing for a company to admit having a proprietary (single vendor) solution – everyone now understands that an open platform’s flexibilities and efficiencies are the way to go. Market research reports repeatedly shore up this trend, and it seems that every manufacturer is therefore claiming their offerings to be IP and Open Platform.

But watch out! Many of them are just paying lip service. It is therefore very important for customers to be able to decipher between a true open platform and those who only claim to have it.

Open Platform Software Definition

If you look up the definition of ‘open platform’ in Wikipedia, it says: “In software and web-based architectures, an **Open Platform** describes a software system which has published external programming interfaces that allow using the software to function in other ways than the original programmer intended, without requiring modification of the source code. Using these interfaces, typically known as Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), a third party could integrate with the platform to add functionality. An open platform implies that the vendor allows, and perhaps supports, the ability to do this. Using an open platform, a developer could add features or functionality that the platform vendor hadn’t completed or hadn’t conceived of.”

Milestone Systems, a global leader in the development of true open platform IP video surveillance management software, says that an open platform “future-proofs” your security investment by allowing upgrades and adding features as they come to market, through integrating third-party solutions and innovations that become available.

Milestone has delivered open platform software since its inception over a decade ago, and with this go-to-market strategy, experiencing growth rates well beyond the industry norm. The word has spread about the many advantages to be gained from decoupling the hardware from the software in video surveillance solutions: giving both partners and customers the ability to choose a “best of breed” solution for optimal security.

Five Hallmarks of Open Platform Software

Milestone defines five hallmarks that anyone should ask to determine if the investment they are about to make is truly in an open platform.

1. Common external programming interfaces

The characteristic of this hallmark is whether a company provides a common Application Programming Interface (API) that can be used easily by consultants, partners or end users. The ability to provide APIs is defined by the architectural design of software, whether it is an open platform that enables third parties to make system and device interfaces with ‘calls and pushes’ to or from the product that create the greater operational efficiencies of combining data, scheduling, alerts, reporting, maintenance, etc. Milestone has APIs and makes them available publicly to anyone who will sign an NDA (Non-Disclosure Agreement).



2. Published documentation

Published documentation weeds out solutions that claim to be open but are really only open in a very limited way. It is possible to acquire a third-party integrated solution even though a vendor does not offer a published Software Development Kit (SDK) but perhaps it is only the vendor or a select partner who has made the integration with a specific system or hardware. This offering would allow that vendor to claim their offering as 'open' while still limiting your choices to their own profit channels.

Milestone provides published APIs through the XProtect SDK that are easy to use and open to any enterprising system integrators. This SDK includes a set of documented examples that enable people to use the APIs by sharing written cases of the APIs in operation. This also has a number of already written (software code) integration elements that can be copied directly to a third-party application. Milestone has several partners who have reported that the XProtect SDK and APIs are the most user-friendly they have seen – it took one partner only 15 minutes to get video to his application using our 'direct show' filter, for example.

3. Training

Training is often the ultimate differentiator between a true open platform and offerings with only some aspects of an open platform. If a manufacturer's open platform offers published APIs and an SDK you are heading in the right direction – but it only begins there. The next step is to train third-party programmers how to write code to the APIs and use the SDK. Training a company to integrate seamlessly to published APIs and getting the most out of an SDK is the true added value for the partners involved - which is passed on to the benefit of the end users.

4. Project Consulting

Project Consulting demonstrates that integration expertise and support are available at the source, and that the manufacturer can take necessary steps to make sure any collaborative integration project with the open platform is smooth and seamless. Alternatively, the original company's engineers can take full ownership of doing an integration, putting it through intensive quality assurance upon a third party request. A department of skillful systems engineers is proof of the depth of competency in a company's product development – and future road map viability.

5. "Walk the talk"

Finally, even with the aforementioned hallmarks this list would not be complete without mentioning that a company actually has to conduct its business according to the open platform approach. This is at the core of the problem with most of today's security vendors: everyone is 'talking the talk' but who is actually 'walking the walk'?

Put them to the test of the five hallmarks to find out!

About Milestone

Milestone Systems is a leading developer of open platform IP video management software. The XProtect™ platform is easy to use, robust and proven in more than 35,000 customer installations around the world. With support for the industry's widest choice in network hardware and seamless integration with other systems, XProtect provides best-of-breed solutions to "video enable" businesses, organizations and institutions - reducing costs, optimizing processes, protecting people and assets. Milestone software is sold through authorized partners in over 90 countries. www.milestonesys.com.

