



ACTIVE WITNESS



Case study

Coho

The early months of 2020 ushered in a virus that not only took over the headlines, but took over the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected millions of people around the globe, bucking social norms, workplace rules, and basic everyday life. Now 18 months later, the world is still in the grips of the virus, but with some hope on the horizon. The food industry in Canada was particularly hard-hit by lockdowns, decreased occupancy, and today still finds itself at risk. The pandemic brought unprecedented challenges and decisions that require nimble and unique solutions.

Restaurants Canada, a foodservice trade organization based in Toronto, shared the difficult reality that many restaurant owners have faced since the beginning of the pandemic. The organization states that 10,000 restaurants have closed since March 2020, leaving the industry with an estimated 800,000 fewer jobs and several businesses reducing working hours to nothing. In addition, the industry has struggled to recover due to revolving restrictions across Canada, with 21% of the restaurant workforce not yet recovered, according to Restaurants Canada.



The Innovative Kitchen Space

An innovative company, Coho Commissary based in Vancouver, has hit upon a unique business model to help local food and beverage businesses with a collaborative environment where they can thrive through various avenues of support, from state-of-the-art kitchen space to permit and licensing processes, to capital investments, and more. These spaces play host to an assortment of disparate culinary ventures in need of commissary space, everything from food trucks and first-timers in the incubation stage to veteran restaurant groups in need of a place prepare, cook, and deliver their food. Today, Coho Commissary's kitchens are home to over one hundred diverse food businesses, from baking bread, to brewing kombucha, to making chocolate.

Coho Commissary knows how to convert large spaces to bustling food service facilities, some with markets and cafes, but found that ensuring a safe and secure work environment was proving difficult. In addition to the staff of current commissary clients, the company had to account for delivery personnel, maintenance staff, and new clients as the business grew. Tracking the comings and goings of so many people, plus the task of adding and removing authorized occupants across several locations was proving cumbersome and time consuming.



The Innovative Security System

Coho Commissary quickly realized that they need a security partner that was as innovative in their technology as Coho was in streamlining food services. Coho found their partner with Active Witness, a state-of-the-art, two-step authentication access system that utilizes an artificial intelligent SIMA sensor connected to a powerful access control cloud service. The Active Witness solution requires two forms of identification: First the solution reads and processes an ID claim (a QR code on a smartphone) and then scans a person's face to complete the two-step authentication, all without the need for a key, ID card, or other form of physical identification. The door only opens if there's a 100% match, allowing only authorized personnel to enter through a door. It is important to note that the SIMA sensor is dormant until an ID claim is detected and only then does the solution search for a matching profile. The sensor does not perform facial recognition monitoring, which could lead to privacy concerns.

The company was also concerned with safeguarding the health of employees and customers and was looking to reduce the number of touch points, so a touchless solution was ideal. Coho recognized the power of the frictionless, two-step authentication, but also saw the value in a compact system that offers authentication and control in one device. First, installation is a quick operation. Active Witness requires only one PoE cable to power the unit and a connection to an electrical lock, including mag locks and electrified strikes. In addition to improved hardware installation, Coho saw real value in the easy-to-use administration interface and the intuitive mobile app to enroll authorized personnel. An added benefit of the Active Witness solution is the ability to pre-program, remotely troubleshoot, prepare, and test the unit off-site prior to installation, again saving time at installation and offering peace of mind that the system will work once installed.

The Active Witness two-step authentication solution ticked all of the boxes for Coho Commissary: secure entry without the need for physical credentials, frictionless operation, and entrance/exit record management. Another key benefit of Active Witness is the intuitive and easy-to-use mobile application that allows an administrator to remotely add and remove authorized personnel from any facility without the need for a manager on-site. Coho also found that training new administrators and users was quick and easy, saving time so Coho could concentrate on keeping the kitchens humming.

Many of us thought that the COVID pandemic would be in the rear-view mirror by now, relegated to the history books and that life would return to normal. Unfortunately, COVID had other plans. Restaurants and the larger food service industry are still struggling, not only to recover but to survive another wave of the pandemic. According to a recent report, Restaurants Canada estimates that 10,000 restaurants across Canada have closed due to the effects of COVID-19, and 50% are expected to close for good if there is no improvement. Unique challenges require innovative thinking, and Coho Commissary along with Active Witness have helped to provide affordable, well-equipped, safe and secure spaces for passionate food and beverage makers. These commissaries serve as an incubator for many small businesses to not just survive but grow.

