



An Extended Guide · No. 1845

How Many Days of Video? Sizing Storage for a Business System

The dials that fill the drive — and how to keep what you need without overpaying

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! Read this first — it's about people, not just pictures

Before the gear, a word that matters more than any camera: with a business you are recording other people — customers, staff, people walking by — so where you point a camera, and whether it picks up sound, is as important as the picture. As a rule, keep cameras on general work and public areas, never on restrooms, changing areas, or anywhere someone expects privacy, and be very careful about recording audio. This guide gives you plain-English general information, not legal advice. For your own situation — especially anything to do with employees, audio, or the law — check with an attorney who knows Ohio. How many days you keep video is also a privacy choice — keep what you'd truly need, not an endless archive of your customers and staff.

How many days of video do you really need?

This is the question that quietly sets the size of your whole system: how far back do you need to be able to look? Keep too little and you miss the thing you needed; keep too much and you pay for storage you'll never watch. This guide helps you land on the right number.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent 30+ years making technology plain for folks, at their own pace. Storage sounds like a numbers game, but you don't need any math — you need to understand a few trade-offs and make a couple of honest decisions.

I'm not going to throw storage numbers at you, because the honest truth is they depend entirely on your cameras, your settings, and your building. What I'll give you instead is the way to think about it, so you can size storage sensibly or ask a vendor the right questions.

★ No math required, I promise

If the words 'terabyte' and 'frame rate' make your eyes glaze, don't worry — that's what I'm here for. Tell me your cameras and how far back you'd want to look, and I'll help you size it. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you'll size storage sensibly.

- ❑ Storage is measured in terabytes; more days of video needs more of it.
- ❑ Five things grow the size: more cameras, higher picture quality, higher frame rate, busier scenes, and more days kept.
- ❑ Modern systems use efficient compression to shrink video without losing much — that helps a lot.
- ❑ Recording only on motion, instead of around the clock, can stretch your days a long way for quiet scenes.
- ❑ When the drive fills, most systems 'overwrite the oldest' — so your days kept is really 'how far back before it recycles.'
- ❑ Use surveillance-rated drives, built to record continuously — ordinary drives wear out fast at this job.

✓ One rule to hold onto

Decide how many days back you'd **realistically** need to look, then size the storage to that. For many businesses the honest answer is a couple of weeks to a month — not the year people imagine they need.

The one idea behind all of it

Before any of the details, hold on to this: video storage is like a bucket, and your settings decide how fast it fills.

Picture a bucket that your cameras are always pouring into. The size of the bucket is your storage — your hard drives. How fast the water pours in depends on your choices: more cameras pour faster, sharper pictures pour faster, busier scenes pour faster. How long until the bucket is full is how many days of video you get to keep.

So sizing storage is really a balance between two things you control: how fast you fill the bucket (your cameras and settings) and how big a bucket you buy (your drives). Turn down the fill rate or buy a bigger bucket, and you keep more days. That's the whole game, and the rest of this guide is just the details of each dial.

✓ You have two dials, not one

If you want more days, you don't have to buy a bigger drive — you can also ease off the fill rate: record on motion, trim the frame rate on quiet cameras, or keep fewer days on the ones that matter least. Often it's a mix.

Dial one: how many cameras

The most obvious dial. Every camera you add is another stream pouring into the bucket, all day, every day.

Two cameras fill the bucket twice as fast as one, roughly speaking, and ten fill it far faster still. This isn't a reason to skimp on cameras you genuinely need — it's a reason to be intentional. Each camera should earn its place by watching something that matters, not sit there filling storage with an empty aisle.

Our planning guide walks through choosing camera spots so each one has a real job. The payoff shows up here: a tight, well-planned set of cameras is cheaper to store than a scattered pile of them, and easier to search when you actually need the footage.

★ Plan the cameras, and storage gets easier

The best way to keep storage sensible is to plan the cameras well in the first place — see our planning guide. Fewer, better-placed cameras cost less to store and save you hunting through useless footage. Call (330) 200-8042 if you'd like help.

Dial two: picture quality and detail

A sharper, more detailed picture is wonderful for identifying someone — and it pours into the bucket faster. This is a real trade-off, not a free lunch.

The more detail a camera captures, the more data each frame holds, and the faster it fills your storage. That's the tension: you want crisp detail at the door and the register so you can actually recognize a face, but you may not need that same fine detail on a camera watching a quiet stockroom ceiling.

The smart move is to match the detail to the job. Spend your quality — and your storage — where identifying someone matters, and ease off where a general overview is all you need. One system can mix the two; not every camera has to be set to its sharpest.

✓ Buy detail where you'll use it

Crank the quality on the identify cameras — the door, the counter — and settle for a sensible overview setting elsewhere. You get the detail that matters in a dispute without paying to store fine detail of an empty corner.

Dial three: frame rate — how smooth the motion

Video is just a flipbook of still pictures. How many pictures per second is the frame rate, and it's a dial most people never touch — but it matters for storage.

More frames per second gives smoother motion, like a movie. Fewer frames gives a slightly choppy picture but still captures what happened — and it pours into the bucket more slowly. For most business cameras, you don't need movie-smooth footage to see who came in and what they did.

There's a balance to strike. Too few frames and a fast-moving person can skip across the scene in a blur; a sensible middle setting captures the action clearly while using far less storage than the maximum. A spot where quick motion matters — a till, a doorway — may warrant more frames than a slow back hallway.

✓ Smoothness you don't need is storage you waste

Maxing out the frame rate on every camera is a common way to burn storage for no real benefit. Set a sensible rate that captures the action, and bump it up only where quick motion truly matters.

Dial four: how busy the scene is

Here's one you don't set — the world sets it for you. A busy scene takes more storage than a still one, and modern systems lean on that.

Thanks to the efficient compression we'll talk about next, a camera watching a still, empty room stores very little — there's nothing changing to record. The moment people, cars, and activity fill the scene, there's far more change to capture, and the storage use climbs. A busy sales floor eats more than a quiet warehouse aisle at 3 a.m.

You can't change how busy your business is, but it's worth knowing, because it means two cameras with identical settings can use very different amounts of storage depending on what they're pointed at. The busy ones are your heavy hitters.

✓ Point matters as much as settings

A camera aimed at a busy doorway will always store more than one aimed at a quiet corner, even with the same settings. When you estimate storage, give your busiest cameras the most weight — they do the most filling.

The dial working in your favor: compression

Finally, some good news. Modern systems use efficient compression that shrinks your video dramatically without throwing away what matters.

Compression is a clever way of storing video that doesn't waste space on the parts that aren't changing. If a hallway sits empty for an hour, the system doesn't store that hour sixty times a second — it notes that nothing changed and saves the space for when something does. Today's systems are very good at this.

You don't have to do anything to get it — a modern recorder or camera uses efficient compression as a matter of course. It's the reason the storage numbers aren't as scary as they'd otherwise be, and the reason a quiet scene costs so little to keep. Just know it's there, quietly working in your favor.

★ Older gear may not be as efficient

If you're taking over an older system, it may use an older, hungrier way of storing video that fills drives faster. That's one of several things worth checking — our guide on taking over an old camera system covers it. Call (330) 200-8042 if you've inherited one.

The dial you most control: days kept

Of all the dials, this is the one you set most directly — and the one worth the most honest thought. How far back would you truly need to look?

Every extra day you keep is more storage, in a straight line: keeping thirty days takes roughly twice the storage of keeping fifteen, all else equal. So the number you pick has a big, direct effect on what you buy. The temptation is to say 'keep everything forever,' but that's expensive and, for most businesses, unnecessary.

Think about how you'd actually use the footage. Most incidents come to light within days — a customer disputes a charge, you notice missing stock, an employee reports something. For a lot of businesses, a couple of weeks to a month of history covers nearly everything. Some situations warrant longer; very few warrant a year.

✓ Ask: how late would bad news arrive?

The right number of days is roughly 'the longest it would take me to find out something happened and go look.' A refund dispute shows up in days; a slow stock shrinkage might take a few weeks. Size to that honest window.

Two kinds of businesses, two sets of needs

How much storage you need, and how many days, depends a lot on your kind of business — a busy storefront and a quiet warehouse fill the bucket at very different rates.

If you run a customer-facing shop or storefront

Busy scenes full of customers mean your cameras fill storage faster, and disputes tend to surface quickly — a refund, a slip, a chargeback. You're storing a lot of activity, but you usually don't need it for long.

- Busy scenes fill fast — give your register and door cameras priority.
- Disputes surface in days, so a couple of weeks of history often covers it.
- Keep high detail on the identify cameras; ease off on overviews.
- Continuous recording makes sense where the scene is busy all day.

If you run an office, warehouse, or back-of-house

Big, often-quiet spaces mean motion-only recording can stretch your days a long way, but you may need to look further back — stock shrinkage and quiet-hours trouble can take weeks to notice.

- Quiet aisles record little, so motion-only can stretch days way out.
- Slow-building problems (shrinkage) may warrant keeping more days back.
- Many cameras over a big space add up — size the drives accordingly.
- A surveillance-rated drive matters most where recording runs nonstop.

★ Not sure how your place adds up?

Tell me your cameras, how busy the scenes are, and how far back you'd want to look, and I'll help you size the drives and settings so you keep what you need without overpaying. Call (330) 200-8042.

Recording all the time, or only on motion?

This single choice can swing your storage more than almost any other, especially for quiet scenes. It's worth understanding well.

Continuous recording captures everything, around the clock, whether anything's happening or not. You never miss a moment, and the timeline is complete — but you store a lot of empty scene. **Motion-only** records just when the camera detects movement, so a quiet hallway at night stores almost nothing, stretching your days a long way.

Motion-only sounds like an easy win, but it has a catch: it leans on the camera correctly spotting motion. Set too sensitive, it records every swaying branch; set too dull, it can miss a slow, careful person. For a busy scene it barely saves anything, because something's always moving. Many businesses mix the two — continuous on the busy, important cameras, motion-only on the quiet ones.

! Motion-only can miss the moment

The risk with motion-only is a gap — a missed trigger means no footage of the thing you cared about. For your most important cameras, the register and the main door, I usually favor continuous recording so there's never a hole.

What 'overwrite oldest' really means

Most systems never truly 'fill up and stop.' They recycle — and understanding that changes how you think about days kept.

When the drive gets full, a camera system normally starts recording over the oldest video to make room for the new. So the system runs forever, but it only ever holds a rolling window — today's footage back to however many days fit. Your 'days kept' is really 'how far back before it records over itself.'

This is why drive size and your settings decide your real retention. Buy a bigger drive, or ease off the fill rate, and the rolling window gets longer. The flip side matters too: if you need to save a specific clip — for police or an insurer — you must export it **before** the system recycles over it.

! Export the important clip before it recycles

If something happens, grab the clip and save a copy off the system promptly, while it's still in the rolling window. Wait too long and the system may record right over it. Our guide on giving video to police or an insurer walks through doing this right.

Why surveillance-rated drives matter

Not every hard drive is built for this job. Using the right kind is one of the easiest ways to keep your system trustworthy for years.

An ordinary hard drive — the kind in a desktop computer — is built for stop-and-start use: busy for a while, then idle. A camera system is the opposite: it writes video continuously, every second of every day, forever. That nonstop workload wears an ordinary drive out far faster than it was ever meant to go.

Surveillance-rated drives exist for exactly this. They're built to record continuously, handle the heat and the constant writing, and keep going for years under a load that would cook a desktop drive. They're the sensible choice for any system that records around the clock, which is most of them.

✓ Ask for drives built to record 24/7

When you buy or spec a recorder, make sure the drives inside are surveillance-rated — built for continuous recording. It's a small detail that decides whether your system quietly serves you for years or fails you at the worst time.

Drives wear out — plan for it

Even the best drive doesn't last forever. Knowing that up front turns a someday failure from a crisis into a shrug.

A hard drive is a mechanical thing, and mechanical things eventually wear out. A drive that's been faithfully recording for years will, one day, fail — and if that's the only copy of your video, that day is a bad one. This isn't cause for alarm; it's just a fact to plan around, like replacing tires.

A couple of habits make it painless. Some systems can use more than one drive so a single failure doesn't wipe everything. And for the clips you truly can't lose, keeping a copy off the system — exported, or in the cloud — means a drive failure never takes your most important footage with it. Our recorder-vs-cloud guide weighs that off-site copy.

★ Catch a failing drive before it dies

Many systems can warn you when a drive is getting tired, if someone's set up to notice. Our maintenance guide covers the simple checks. I'm glad to set up those alerts so a worn drive gets replaced on a calm day, not a bad one. Call (330) 200-8042.

Storing it on site or in the cloud

Where your video lives changes how storage sizing works — the dials are the same, but the bucket is somebody else's.

On a local recorder, you buy the drives and the days you keep are limited by how big they are. In the cloud, there's no drive of yours to size — instead you pick a plan, and the days you keep are set by what you pay for each month. The same forces apply (more cameras, more quality, more days all cost more), but you turn a drive dial into a subscription dial.

Which path suits you is its own good-sized decision — cost shape, internet needs, and what happens if gear is stolen or a bill lapses. I won't repeat it here; our recorder-vs-cloud guide walks through choosing between a local box and the cloud in full.

✓ Same dials, different bucket

Whether you store on site or in the cloud, the five things that grow your storage are the same. The only difference is whether more days means a bigger drive or a bigger subscription. See the recorder-vs-cloud guide to choose.

A sensible way to estimate without the math

You can get a workable estimate without a spreadsheet. Here's the plain way I walk owners through it.

Start from your camera list and your days target. For each camera, note three things: how detailed it needs to be, how busy its scene is, and whether it'll record continuously or only on motion. The identify cameras in busy spots are your heavy hitters; the quiet motion-only cameras barely register. That picture alone tells you where the storage goes.

From there, a reputable recorder maker or a good vendor can turn your camera count, settings, and days into a drive size using their own figures — figures I won't invent here because they vary so much. Your job is to walk in with clear answers about detail, activity, mode, and days, so the estimate fits your real use.

★ I'll help you build the estimate

Bring me your camera list and how far back you want to look, and we'll mark up each camera's detail, activity, and mode together. Then a vendor's sizing tool gives a number you can trust, because it's built on your real answers. Call (330) 200-8042.

Ways to stretch your days without buying more

If your estimate comes up short of the days you want, you don't always have to buy a bigger drive. Here are the honest levers.

- ❑ Switch quiet cameras to motion-only recording.
- ❑ Ease the frame rate down on cameras where smooth motion doesn't matter.
- ❑ Right-size the detail — full quality on identify cameras, sensible settings on overviews.
- ❑ Make sure the system is using efficient modern compression.
- ❑ Drop a camera that isn't earning its keep, or re-aim it at something that matters.
- ❑ Or simply buy a bigger or second drive — sometimes that's the cleanest answer.

✓ Trim the waste before you buy the drive

Often a mix of these — motion-only on the quiet cameras, a sensible frame rate, right-sized detail — buys you the extra days without spending a dime on storage. Try the dials before you reach for the wallet.

Common mistakes people make

A few avoidable slip-ups cause most storage regret. Now you'll know them in advance.

- **Keeping everything at maximum** — top detail and frame rate on every camera — and filling the drive in no time.
- **Guessing at days** instead of thinking honestly about how far back you'd really look.
- **Using ordinary drives** not built for continuous recording, so they wear out early.
- **Relying on motion-only for the key cameras**, then finding a gap where the trigger missed.
- **Forgetting the system recycles**, so the clip you needed got recorded over before you saved it.
- **No plan for a drive failure**, so one dead drive wipes the only copy.

! The one that costs you the footage

Not exporting an important clip before the system records over it. The moment something happens, grab the clip and save a copy off the system — the rolling window won't wait for you.

Questions to ask before you buy

Whether you're talking to a vendor, an installer, or to me, these questions get you storage that fits your real needs.

Q: How many days will this hold, with my cameras and settings?

A good answer ties the days to your actual camera count, quality, frame rate, and recording mode — not a generic 'up to' number. Push for an estimate built on your setup.

Q: Are the drives surveillance-rated for continuous recording?

They should be. Ordinary desktop drives wear out fast under nonstop recording. If a vendor can't tell you what's inside, that's a reason to ask harder.

Q: Will it warn me before a drive fails?

Many systems can alert you to a tired drive if someone sets it up. You want to replace a worn drive on a calm day, not discover it dead after an incident.

Q: How do I save a clip before the system records over it?

You should be able to export an important clip to a drive or the cloud quickly and simply. Make sure you know how before you need it in a hurry.

✓ Insist on an estimate built on your setup

Beware a flat 'this holds 30 days' with no mention of your cameras or settings — it's meaningless without them. A vendor worth buying from will size it from your real answers.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from owners sizing their storage, answered plainly.

Q: How many days of video should I keep?

As many as it would realistically take you to find out something happened and go look. For many businesses that's a couple of weeks to a month. Disputes and refunds surface in days; slow problems like stock shrinkage may take a few weeks. Very few need a year.

Q: What makes video take more storage?

Five things: more cameras, higher picture quality, higher frame rate, busier scenes, and more days kept. Efficient modern compression and motion-only recording pull the other way and save space.

Q: How much storage will I actually need?

It depends entirely on those five dials, so I won't throw a number at you. Mark up each camera's detail, activity, and recording mode, then a vendor's sizing tool turns that into a drive size built on your real setup.

Q: Do I need special hard drives?

Yes — use surveillance-rated drives, built to record continuously. Ordinary desktop drives wear out fast under the nonstop writing a camera system does.

Q: What happens when the drive fills up?

Most systems overwrite the oldest video to make room, so you always hold a rolling window of the most recent days. That's why you must export an important clip promptly, before the system records over it.

★ Still unsure how much you need?

Sizing storage is exactly the kind of thing I love to make simple. Tell me your cameras and how far back you'd want to look, and I'll help you land on the right drives and settings. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

Putting it all together

That's storage, start to finish. Here's the whole thing boiled down to a few plain sentences.

Think of storage as a bucket your cameras fill. Five things speed the fill: **more cameras, higher quality, higher frame rate, busier scenes, and more days kept**. Efficient compression and motion-only recording slow it. You size the bucket — the drives — to hold the days you'd realistically need, which for most businesses is a couple of weeks to a month.

Use **surveillance-rated drives** built for nonstop recording, know the system **overwrites the oldest** when full so you export important clips promptly, and plan for the day a drive wears out. Match your detail and frame rate to each camera's job, and you'll keep what matters without paying for footage you'll never watch.

★ Let's size it right together

Tell me your cameras and how far back you want to look, and I'll help you size the drives and set the dials so you keep what you need and nothing you don't. First visit is a flat \$99, or \$49 for help on your screen. Call (330) 200-8042.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made sizing storage for your camera system feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it with your other business papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything — that's what the guide is for.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your place of business, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I'm a tech helper, not a licensed electrician or low-voltage contractor — for in-wall wiring or panel work I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro and make sure it all works together.

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What Grows Your Storage

Five dials fill the bucket; two quietly empty it

	Effect on storage	You control it?
More cameras	Fills faster	Yes
Higher quality	Fills faster	Yes
Higher frame rate	Fills faster	Yes
Busier scene	Fills faster	No
More days kept	Fills faster	Yes

Efficient compression and motion-only recording pull the other way.

Sizing Storage in Four Steps

No math -- just clear answers about your cameras



Clear answers in, a trustworthy drive size out.

Continuous vs. Motion-Only

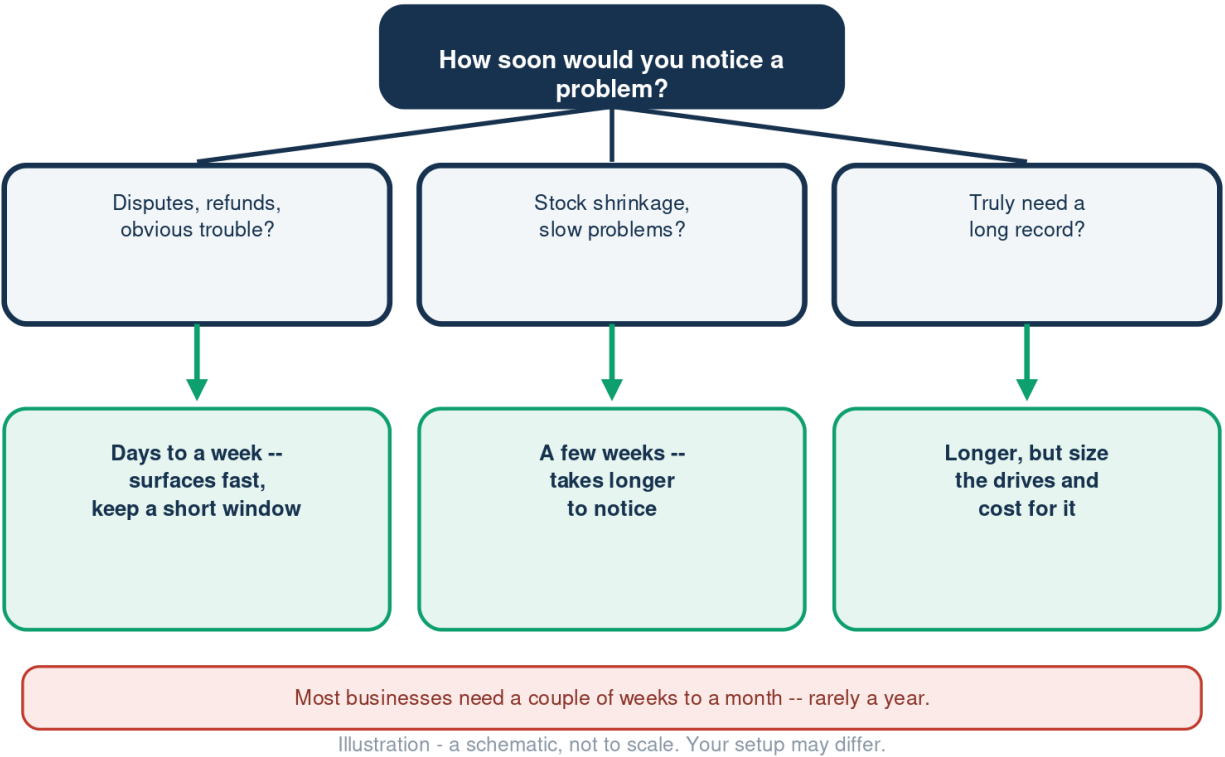
How each records, and where each fits

	Continuous	Motion-only
Captures	Everything	Only movement
Storage used	More	Much less*
Risk of a gap	None	Missed trigger
Best for	Till, main door	Quiet areas

*Little saved on busy scenes, where something always moves.

How Many Days to Keep?

Size to how late bad news would realistically arrive





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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

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