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Security Systems INTEGRATION

BY DAVE GYURINA AND
CHRISTINE SUDUT

SECURITY SYSTEMS INTEGRATION IS TRULY A GROWTH SECTOR OF THE SECURITY INDUSTRY, BUT PUTTING A STRICT DEFINITION TO IT IS EASIER SAID THAN DONE.

This is because many times, the client's needs or the final application of the selected technology defines the overall program. In the government sector, for example, it often means combining new systems with old technology. For the world of banking, however, it may mean integrating safety, security and prevention in one bundle. A municipal facilities manager might want better system control, more efficiency and less paperwork.

No matter the exact usage, systems integration can be defined as combining and consolidating the variety of security technology tools available today based on customers' specific needs. For example, security systems are often integrated to include alarms, cameras, and CCTV equipment along with cards and readers. Frequently, companies will incorporate security video, access control, perimeter detection, video visitation, guard tours, networking, and many other security services. Systems integration can also include combining security systems with fire and emergency management, communications or telecommunications, HVAC and building systems or other end-user systems. For even broader use, systems can be integrated in one area of the company or across multiple locations.

Whatever the final configuration or chosen definition, security systems integration is most valuable when it simply does the job it was intended to do. In



today's market, many building owners are demanding the best in technology, and systems integration is one way builders can provide that, while potentially saving money up front.

WHAT'S EFFECTIVE

By coordinating various security systems into a common infrastructure, the independent components can work together more effectively and efficiently. For example, in the event of a security alarm or crisis situation, lights could turn on automatically or designated doors could lock or unlock immediately. Systems integration can also streamline security with time, attendance, location tracking or other variables. In some cases, companies have used identification badges linked into the main system to access buildings and other areas of the work location, while also recording employee hours.

An example of a security system working in conjunction with the fire and safety system would be a situation in which the fire alarm system detects a fire, then the HVAC system shuts down in that area to prevent spreading and clearing of the smoke via pressurizing affected areas. The security and access control systems can next unlock the route for firefighters while security cameras can provide live footage of the fire and its exact location, size and severity.

Systems integration also can be used to cut costs. Among the ways this works is setting up lights to go on and off automatically at predetermined times, increasing or decreasing room temperatures at set times, or even reducing training time since employees only need to learn one system. These cost-saving benefits are in addition to the savings that a security system itself can provide through lowered incidence of crime, reduction in product loss, insurance cost savings and more.

Security technology has advanced quickly over the last five to ten years and will continue to grow in the coming years. Along with this growth comes the knowledge

and ability to do more with technology and security while providing even more value to the consumer. Growing areas of security technology include video monitoring, remote access to security footage via any computer, reports and settings from web-enabled devices, wireless technologies and GPS tracking of commercial vehicles or security officers on patrol, to name a few. As this technology becomes more prevalent, prices are coming down.

WHAT TO SEEK

Once a company decides security system integration is the right choice, there are several criteria that should be checked in hiring the right provider—whether that provider is going to work directly for you the builder, your future building owner or coordinate both efforts. They include:

- **Quality and experience:** Much like choosing any service provider, it is important to check the reputation and finished work of the company being hired. Key items to look for with security integration would include the company's years in business, customer testimonials and prominence in the industry.

Additionally, with security, it is important to ask about licensing and certification. The individual system integrators and system engineers must be certified for specific project types and for areas of expertise. The largest certification body in security is the ASIS (formerly known as the American Society for Industry Security), but there are other organizations and state bodies, as well. Check to make sure you are hiring a system integrator that is actually certified for the work that needs to be done in your state of residence or has national accreditation. For example, there are specific certifications for working on Fire/Life safety, security electronics and communications and for CPP (Certified Protection Professional—the most widely recognized security practitioner designation). The company or individual you hire should

have up-to-date knowledge on state and city building, national electrical and National Fire Protection Association codes.

- **Product choices:** Integration companies either offer one manufacturer's products or a selection from a variety of manufacturers. When choosing which company to use, you should evaluate your particular needs and how well the product offerings can meet these needs. A company with only one manufacturer's products may be more limited in their offerings and pricing, whereas a company with a diverse selection of suppliers may have more flexibility when choosing the products that best fit your needs and budget now, as well as in the future.
- **Services available:** Depending on a company's needs, a smaller, specialized supplier may work, or a full-service provider that "does it all" (and hopefully does it well) may be needed. When integrating security systems, it is important to consider the quality and breadth of services that will be available. Will you need to work with one company to integrate the system but another to handle security issues—such as responding to emergencies or alarms, archiving capabilities, live remote viewing, guard services, etc?

If a building owner needs a specific system or two, a specialized company or division of a larger organization could be the best choice because they would have in-depth knowledge about the one area of security or the system that is specifically needed. Remember to think about future needs. If a building owner or builder decides to expand or integrate with another system down the road, another company may need to enter the picture if the first one doesn't handle that type of work. If the needs are more complex or will evolve and expand over time, a full-service company could be the way to go. If a security company provides a wide variety of services, it should be able to assist with the first stage of the system and then integrate with additional systems as the owner expands along the way. Another consideration is customizability. For more complex jobs, it may be important for an organization to be able to think outside of the "prepackaged" box and create a system or network of systems that will fit exact needs as they evolve.

- **Integration with existing system:** Perhaps most important is the ability to use and improve upon a company's existing information technology infrastructure. Depending on that system, a reputable supplier should be able to incorporate its software and peripherals with existing programs with little effort or without excessive time. One way to improve the existing system and increase security at the same time is to add a video management system. These types of systems protect against unwanted data access and also improve security with high quality cameras to monitor activity at a site.

Every company has its own set of unique needs and requirements when it comes to security and security systems integration. The right fit between customer and supplier can save a company money in the short term on construction materials and integration product costs and in the long term through increased security, functionality and lower maintenance costs. For example, a private university in Florida saved 15 percent of its initial \$10 million investment because unnecessary cabling or redundant wiring was eliminated from the original design due to integration of systems.

Those who are looking to hire system integrators need to do the homework, check out a range of potential suppliers and not rush a decision that could affect the business for many years to come. ■

This article was written and submitted by DAVE GYURINA and CHRISTINE SUDUT of Estey-Hoover Advertising and Public Relations with input from Jeanette Hernandez, Marketing Manager for CPS Security Solutions. CPS has been a leader in surveillance and protection of construction sites and commercial properties for 20 years and has operated in the security systems industry for over 15 years. For more information, go to www.cpssecurity.com.