



Putting Things Together

Accurately determining needs to ensure end users get the right results

By Don Douglas

In these times of changing technologies, the various manufacturer offerings, contractor's abilities, and the results to be expected from "integrated systems" confuse many end users. Despite all the change, however, a security professional always needs to start his or her needs determination process with a risk assessment.

All too often, when consultants ask end users why they are considering a system, they are at a loss to describe their actual risks and supply answers that include the following:

- "We have to keep management happy."
- "We are trying to increase the level of security at this building."
- Or, often with video: "We need a visual deterrent."

But in order to get the right equipment, end users really have to know what they need and how they will truly get results. With that in mind, it is necessary to be aware of the application of current technologies relative to the ability to obtain a quality system solution that can actually exceed end user expectations.

The truth is, the "security basics" – including door integrity, lock quality, key control, alarm response, communication line protection and lighting – are often overlooked by the bidding security integrator. Yet these key elements are all part of the "onion effect" high-level security professionals use in the assessment and application of new security elements. They require as many different layers of protection as are reasonable to be placed between those assets to be protected and potential criminals.

Another caveat: In today's application of video solutions, recognition versus detection is a wise thing to preach. Most systems currently applied are primarily detection systems. That is, "I see someone there. I don't think they should be there. And I better investigate further." That is all well and good providing someone actually sees the activity, absorbs the threat, and is prepared to deal with it in-

stantly. But reality often finds security departments scrambling post incident to determine the "who" using poorly applied and often outdated equipment.

BREAKING IT DOWN

In larger systems that employ 20 or more cameras, it is extremely important to integrate multiple security elements to cause an "action forcing reaction" by the security officer. The design elements of such a

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system can be broken down into three key parts: imaging, monitoring and recording.

The imaging element. This element represents the pickup device or camera. Black-and-white imaging may have a place in today's world, but it should only be used when the environment dictates a need for infrared illumination. High-resolution colour cameras are best. Their performance continues to improve and impress, making the key decision fixed or pan/tilt/zoom (PTZ).

The site and level of integration may help in the decision, but many people still do not know that a quality PTZ dome camera often includes auto-focus and the ability to automatically respond to both hardware and software inputs, ensuring a proper field of view without operator input. Fixed high-resolution cameras retain their value as a key component when aimed at either critical entry and egress points, or across a critical travel route. Budgets of-

ten dictate quantity and thereby placement of cameras. To aid in the fixed versus PTZ decision, plan on the cost of four fixed cameras being equal to the cost of one PTZ.

The monitoring element. This refers to how the system will be monitored "live." Will there be a security officer stationed at a console around the clock? Should others in the company have a view of certain cameras and, if so, should they have control?

Most security directors have good reason to view and control from their desktops, and as systems grow in quantity, the matrix switcher provides the "brains" to both manage and control the system (manually and/or automatically). Many people believe that viewing all cameras si-

multaneously is the answer, but it is only reasonable to expect a human to effectively absorb images from approximately four cameras at any given time. This makes matrix switching the best tool available to ensure critical actions are caught, and the necessary responses carried out.

The recording component. This is the critical element. Analog VCRs have performed admirably but are now a technology of the past. Varying resolution (due to age and maintenance) and the time required to both find and print an incident have caused frustration and often rendered useless information.

Digital video recording (DVR) raises the bar for any system it is fitted to. It provides much higher resolution and clarity and long record duration. As well, the speed at which an incident can be found, printed and resolved has helped DVRs explode in popularity. Among other advantages, as digital video is recorded, end users enter

a digital world of opportunity for remotely viewing, exporting and responding in an instant. And so, as these units become more mainstream (and less expensive), end users' satisfaction levels will undoubtedly greatly improve as well.

The hidden element. The hidden and absolutely critical element in the entire equation has not yet been mentioned. It is the contractor.

Nothing can diminish or improve the overall performance of a system more than the expertise of the installer. Many feel a "hang it here, point it there" application renders a "quality" installation. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Cable vulnerability, camera setup and proper night focus of the fixed lenses are just some of the areas that are overlooked far too often.

End users should always demand better solutions. The manufacturers will respond, and any installation company or individual

that thinks "good enough" is the answer will not be around for long. Once needs are assessed, end users must ask the right questions and find an installer that has as much technical knowledge and hands-on experience as possible. After all, knowing exactly what is needed and who can professionally provide it is key to achieving the best possible success with any effective security system.

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