

How to safeguard a building's security

By Greg Norred

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If you were to enter any office building 10 year ago, chances are security would have consisted of one or two uniformed guards at most. Today, the human factor is being replaced by electronics, and office building security consists of state-of-the-art video equipment, high-tech surveillance, closed-circuit cameras and access control systems.

What caused the move toward electronic security? While the sophisticated equipment used to secure an office building can



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cost up to thousands of dollars, it is in fact more cost effective than uniformed security officers. Instead of paying up to two or three full-time security officers each month, companies have only a one-time cost.

Further, the reliability and increased safety for employees provided by electronic engineering and its improvement over the last decade have made it the obvious choice for building or office security.

No longer must uniformed guards be solely responsible for the safety and security of a building and its employees. Now, electronics supervise themselves and the reliability increases tremendously.

Before choosing which type of security is best for their building or individual office, companies should first define what they need to protect. Is the parking lot poorly lit with many employees working after-hours? Is it your company's sales

information, cash or expensive computer equipment? Is your company a 24-hour operation or does it close at a certain time of day?

Next, decide what exactly the security program should accomplish. While no security program can completely eliminate potential danger and losses, companies can minimize the risks by an acceptable degree. Most will find that a single product or service can not effectively answer all security needs. Instead, a combination of highly visible services and products, i.e. uniformed guards, surveillance cameras, and more discreet devices, i.e. personal identification numbers, work best.

Finally, before choosing a security firm, investigate those available in the marketplace. Ask for references from companies similar to yours and find out how their security firm and its products and services have worked for them.

Because of the increase in theft and crime, more and more buildings are adopting security systems that allow access only to specific personnel. This is especially true for distribution centers and industrial buildings which are proven to have a higher probability of internal employee theft. Multiple door systems allow authorized persons to enter a building but prevent intruders and those without authorization to access certain areas. These systems allow for tracking, controlling and auditing of the movement of authorized and unauthorized individuals. A card reader enables

authorized card holders to enter the building, indicating the date and time of entry.

In some cases, a key pad allows use of personal identification numbers (PINs). This system is pre-programmed so that entrance doors open and lock at specified times. The entrance of each individual is recorded so that employers have a record of who's coming and going after-hours. Whether it's a typewriter to confidential company documents that are stolen from a company, management has an accurate record of who was on the floor at the time of the theft. The card reader also registers attempts at unauthorized entry. PINs are phased in and out as employees come and go so there is no need for concern about employees copying keys or entering buildings after their termination.

Closed circuit television (CCTV) is also emerging as an important security tool for commercial buildings. More than 50 percent of Class A and B buildings have the device to monitor activity in the building. CCTV systems are usually monitored by a guard, allowing a single guard to be in many places at once, visually, even permitting closer looks at suspicious situations. Despite the initial expense of these units, pay back begins immediately because of lowered costs of personnel, the ability to monitor large areas in detail, the ability to retain records for review or as evidence, and the ability to observe activities both instantaneously and long term.

Similar to CCTV, companies may also choose those systems which link security systems with a central station. These are the latest in elec-

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tronic security services and protect offices from break-in and fires, but also provide management with systems to control access to sensitive areas. They also monitor the environmental equipment, such as air conditioning, chillers, heating and ventilating. There are also fewer false alarms with this type of system.

Companies that command extra tight security may choose to install a system that has exclusive entries for only their employees. Only certain authorized personnel can enter on specific floors. Card/key access control systems use cards with a coded magnetic strip which is scanned as the card is fed through the reader slot or exposed to the reader unit. If the computer recognizes the code, access is gained.

Systems such as these can be used to reflect changes in personnel or to restrict access to certain areas. Lock and key systems, however, can be compromised by unauthorized use of codes by outsiders and vandals.

Most large security companies provide uniformed guard services which can be a highly visible deterrent to crime. When selecting a security firm, make sure the firm conducts in-depth background checks of its guards.

The number of security guards in the United States security guard industry has grown since 1980 to nearly twice the size of the U.S. public law enforcement community, and today, there are 10,000 security companies nationwide. Unfortunately, the majority of these are mom-and-pop type of businesses that operate on a shoestring budget and

pay their minimum wage. These types of companies usually do not administer background checks on the guards nor do they provide adequate training. Because they are underpaid, under-screened and under-trained, many times, the guards end up hurting those they're trying to protect. Generally, a mix of both guards and electronic security is most effective.

For example, Class A buildings should have card/key access control with video which permits free access by employees during the day but requires a control card after hours. A burglar alarm and intrusion detection device are also essential, as well as an automatic fire alarm. Only one guard may be necessary during the day to monitor the video cameras. At night, however, one guard should monitor while another patrols the building and parking areas. Many security companies offer 24-hour monitoring services, and complex signal, receiving and notification services that will notify the security company's officials and authorities of forced entry within seconds.

Class B buildings may only require one guard with cameras at all exits and a fire alarm. Property management should decide if cameras are necessary on individual floors. However, for companies that require extra security, such as those in the medical and legal profession, arrangements should be made with building management to install additional security.

When choosing security for an office building or individual offices,

developers and building managers should select an outside security firm that will come in and survey the area in advance and give a cost estimate based on individual needs. Most comprehensive security systems for Class A buildings run about \$50,000 to install, with maintenance costs at approximately \$3,600 annually. Make sure, however, the security company will guarantee all parts and labor for one year. Most companies also offer a cost effective, five-year maintenance plan.

A small camera system for monitoring the parking decks and lobby of the building may be sufficient for some buildings and can cost as little as \$5,000. Prices, however, can soar to as much as \$100,000 for the most advanced systems.

Most security systems take approximately four weeks to install. The systems should be updated every five years; however, companies should have systems inspected annually.

Most importantly, successful security programs require the acceptance and support of the users, from top management through the entire company. Finally, the cost of installing a security system for your office or building is minimal compared to the personal loss of an employee or the cost of one unauthorized person obtaining confidential company information.

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