



BUILDING ALARMS

By Michael T. Grady, Senior Vice President of Vector Security, Inc.

THE OTHER SIDE OF EXCEPTION REPORTING

Today, most loss-prevention managers (LPs) dedicate a lot of time and money fighting in-store shrinkage with the latest in video surveillance and point-of-sale (POS) solutions, because it's clear that thieves (dishonest employees and shoplifters) have staked their claim indoors. Building alarm systems receive less time and attention than other technologies, not because they are less important, but because they are a mature and stable technology. An alarm system should be LP's first line of defense in minimizing and deterring loss.

But false alarms caused by user error and lack of proper system maintenance suggest that LPs may have relaxed too much when it comes to daily alarm management. Alarm system problems rarely hit the radar screen, until there is a high loss due to circumvention or system failure, incidents due largely to factors that could have been easily remedied if someone were watching. While POS and EAS policies stress strict adherence to practices that maximize the technology investment, alarm system management, operation and training have seemingly become lower priorities.

Inadequate building alarm management can reduce ROI, broadcast a position of indifference to employees and public response agencies, and allow dishonest employees to use poor alarm management as a means to successfully steal.

False Alarms Are Costly

False alarms are costing some multilocation chains hundreds of thousands of dollars in fees and fines. And if that figure alone hasn't served to get management's attention, the looming threat of nonresponse policies certainly will. Consider arriving at work someday soon to a message that a police department in the city where you have a large business presence has simply refused to respond from this point forward. You will need to hire a private first-response service, which will contact the public agency to respond only if circumstances warrant it. The false alarm epidemic is another problem not yet hitting the LP radar screen, but when it does it will create a big, loud blip.

LPs can avoid these types of problems altogether by

adopting newer, relatively inexpensive and easy-to-operate technologies designed specifically to manage building alarm programs. A well-designed program can become the gateway to critical information available almost instantly. These programs include summary reports, all exception activities, detailed exceptions, and the ability for users to make account information changes electronically. They also eliminate endless faxes, file cabinets overstuffed with paper reports, and the temptation to "file and forget."

LPs can easily monitor important events (including alarms, dispatches, forced arming, irregular openings and closings, and late events), spot trouble locations, take immediate action, and reduce false alarms. LPs can see events as they occur in real time, and can log onto the system from their office, home, hotel room or airport gate.

Alarm exception reporting programs provide a state-of-the-art solution to a problem that has plagued the LP community for years. Building alarm systems are a first line of defense, but effectively managing those systems has become both burdensome and labor intensive. Until now, the response for many was to react only after experiencing a serious problem, but that no longer addresses today's tentative public response positions. ★



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