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Access Control and Security Systems: Successful Investment Model

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Selecting the most effective security system for a commercial building can be a difficult road for building owners and property managers to traverse. Mistakes are easy to make and are often recognized when it is too late to correct them.

In making the initial investment in a security system, owners and property managers often rely solely on cutting-edge technology to deliver the total security solution. Unfortunately, technology alone cannot ensure the continuing viability and effectiveness of a system nor properly adapt to future threats and changing building or tenant needs.

To extract the greatest value from a security-system investment, building owners and managers need to focus on how the system will be run. Proper forethought in the planning process helps to negotiate the long road successfully.

An effective security system can be compared with a chain: only as strong as its weakest link. The segments of this security chain are initial system integration, maintenance and system management.

Initial System Integration

The initial system integration segment of the chain comprises two links: design and installation. At the outset of the process, building owners and property managers often rely on a security consultant to perform a customized needs-assessment and threat analysis. Based on the expert's opinion, a security system featuring a variety of electronic components, ranging from access-card readers to eye and fingerprint scanning devices, is designed to meet the client's needs.

When the system is installed, the consultant's work is over. But if consideration has not been given to system maintenance and management, the system will not be effective. No matter how advanced the newly installed technology is, if the system as a whole is not driven by functionality and longevity, it will not be successful.

System Maintenance and Management

Preventive maintenance composes the second segment of the chain. There is no substitute for having a knowledgeable professional on call: System repairs are expedited so the system operates in peak condition. Tenant and building safety must never be compromised.

The third segment, system management, is the

most crucial portion of the chain. It also is the most frequently overlooked segment, taking a back seat to initial system integration and system maintenance. With properly run systems, the functions in this segment keep the system relevant and ensure its long-term health.

With poorly run systems, a building owner quickly finds him or herself back at the beginning, investing in an entirely new system.

System management comprises five functions: monitoring, programming, operations, administration and changes/upgrades. This segment requires the greatest investment in infrastructure and expertise across multiple disciplines to be effective. Continuous and dedicated attention must be given to each function.

Monitoring fire, life-safety and critical mechanical and electronic systems, as well as initiating the appropriate response to alarms, is mandatory.

The status of interior and perimeter building doors, as well as temperature, flood, smoke and equipment failure, must be watched at all times. If a door is ajar for an extended time, tenants' safety and building integrity are compromised. Similarly, if the computer room becomes too hot, stored data is in jeopardy.

Programming responsibilities involve implementing changes to the configuration of the system to ensure it continues to monitor and operate the system's security devices.

Building and tenant needs change weekly or even daily as tenants expand, contract or reconfigure their spaces. It is essential for the system to keep pace.

The operational aspects of system management consist of running the system to ensure its performance. The critical components of this process are emergency generators, redundant computers, technical infrastructure and an information-technology staff that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

One of the most important responsibilities of operating a system is to back up the database of information continually.

Administration encompasses numerous responsibilities, ranging from access-card

activation and authorization to maintaining vital building or tenant data. In administering access cards for newly hired, recently promoted or terminated employees, who may be specific to readers, office locations, departments, floors and time of day, it is imperative to keep databases current and prevent security breaches.

Proper card administration ensures the accuracy of the reporting function, which compiles customized reports on employee activity and visitor traffic. Administration includes maintaining accurate and current emergency contact information across an ever-changing employee population, training operators and establishing tenant protocols.

The final function involves upgrades and changes to the system as technology improves and new functionality is introduced. Hardware and software that are state-of-the-art today may become dinosaurs without updating. When these changes and upgrades are effected, it is critical to avoid disruptions to the system.

A Strong Security Chain

Building owners and property managers continually feel pressured to install top-quality security systems to protect their tenants and their investments. Identifying and installing the most effective system for a building requires a substantial investment upfront, and advanced technology alone is insufficient to secure an office or building.

Building owners need all three segments of the security "chain" — initial system integration, maintenance and system management — to protect their investment.

Effective system management — encompassing maintenance, monitoring, programming, operations, administration, and upgrades/changes — is necessary to provide the requisite functionality, flexibility and operational continuity to secure building and tenant space.

When these functions are provided continuously and correctly, building owners and managers have a strong chain to protect their tenants and their investment.



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