

THE BOTTOM LINE

IN ASSOCIATION WITH CSL DUALCOM



The interview that gets the facts from the top



This month, Simon Banks talks to one of the UK's most successful High Street Retailers with well over a thousand stores. The person being interviewed is a Senior Security Manager within the organisation and has asked for anonymity owing to the sensitive nature of the content.

■ **How long have you worked in the retail security sector?**

he security industry for most of my life, but retail security as a specifier for 14 years.

■ **What aspect of your experience serves you the best in today's economic downturn?**

A thorough understanding of the risks our estate is under, and the options open to us to mitigate these risks, along with a good understanding of the principles of Designing-out-crime. As the rates of overnight crime against our estate have risen, we have needed to be on the front foot when it comes to providing a suitable solution to reduce the likelihood of repeat incidents, as well as reducing the rewards the offenders are enjoying. Proactively conducting risk assessments, and investing in the property over the last 4-5 years have achieved this. In addition, by responding in a timely way to every attack with an appropriate target hardening measure has stood us in good stead and our actual loss from this type of attack has been significantly reduced. The tool-kit of options available to us is constantly being reviewed, as are the suppliers.

■ **What is the most important security measure for a retailer?**

The perceived solution to every problem is CCTV, and I am constantly being asked for systems to be installed in response to incidents. However, seldom is CCTV the real or only answer. CCTV is a great deterrent if used wisely, and comes into it's own when operated efficiently, but as a retailer we do not invest vast amounts into proactively using CCTV, as it is more of a reactive tool and systems need to be designed accordingly. It is also becoming harder to satisfy the local Police and Courts with CCTV images, because of the demand for crystal clear digital footage. In a large estate, we do not have the investment ability to provide this ideal, but rely on a lot of old analogue VCR recordings.

CCTV analytics have been popping up now and again, but can they really help in the retail industry? They need to go a long way further yet.

Access control is important to restrict movement, but as you can't remove human error without a vast investment, you have to rely on good old management principles and staff rules. So, are we better investing in simple digital locks and door closures?

Intruder alarms are an essential means of securing an unoccupied building, but retaining police response is very difficult under the current climate, and is perhaps going to be a thing of the past. We are certainly looking at alternatives and costing our options to make sure we can jump before we are pushed! I do not believe the alarm industry has helped itself over the years, as the standard of installation is often brought into question, and who is really policing the standards?

Data mining is, without doubt, one of today's stars. Again, not on its own, but as a deterrent it is good and as a tool in the armory, working with CCTV and vigilant managers, it is a champion.

■ **How has your experience been in dealing with security installation companies?**

Just as our customers want better value for their money, so do we and that is where the conflict starts. I am pleased to say that not all contractors want the quick return, and promise one thing and

deliver another after six months. Some of our suppliers have been with us for many years and still provide an excellent service by going the extra mile for us, as we like to do for our customers. Others are snapping at their heels, trying to poach the work. When they come along, it is good to give them an opportunity, but do we have the time to measure and check their performance? KPIs are used to measure and control the service levels; I only wish there were more hours in the day to give the KPIs a thorough challenge.

■ **What is your advice to other Retailers during the recession?**

Just like R&D, you can't afford not to invest. The undesirables out there are looking to feed their greed or their need, and they will continue to steal and will pick on the easy option every time. This undesirable can be from within or outside of the organisation, and as times get harder the profile of the thief is likely to change. Don't lose sight of who is doing what.

■ **What has been your greatest challenge to date?**

Moving the intruder alarm monitoring and maintenance. It is surprising how comfortable you can get with a supplier you trust, only to realise the delivery isn't as good as it needs to be! Nothing remains the same, and so it was with our alarm systems. We were guilty of becoming too familiar, trusting perhaps, even taking an eye off the ball to have it come back and bite. Then, after a major investment, we discovered twelve months later that sites were still falling off Police response without fully understanding why. It had to stop, and the management of the alarms had to be challenged. Unfortunately this was not part of the agreement, so it was time to go off and find another agreement where the management was part of the delivery. As a retailer, our strengths are not in security services, so this need must be brought-in. For the first time in many years, everything was changed - monitoring, maintenance and now management. Six months down the line you could ask what all the fuss was about? We are almost there, but this is one ball that is being firmly kept in-the-air.

■ **What is the worst trait found in the relationship between alarm installers and retailers?**

The face of the alarm company – in that I mean the engineer who turns up at 2am to tell a key-holder who has been waiting for his arrival for 3.5 hours that the problem is, "a spider must have walked over the PIR", as he can't find anything wrong! Alternatively, he spends 45 minutes talking to an "expert" on the phone trying to diagnose the problem, with no result. Don't tell lies, even little white ones! Instead, isolate the problem and get a real engineer there the next morning to correct the fault. Even better, complete the 2 PPM visits correctly that you are being paid to do, and reduce the equipment failure rates.

YOU SAID IT!

Since BT's u-turn on their 21CN roll-out and unexpected updates to local exchanges we've experienced issues with our DigiS. DigiPlus® solved these problems and cut call costs.

JUSTIN WALSH, ENGINEERING MANAGER, THE SECURITY SPECIALISTS.

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CSL DualCom would like to thank you for your participation in 'The Bottom Line' column and wish you every success for the future