

The best of both worlds



It's the ever present debate; what's best for security, man or machine? Is replacing guards with technology the most efficient way to improve security or are the instincts of an SIA licensed guard irreplaceable? The ideal solution is to utilise both disciplines

and a monitor and left to it."

Fortunately, procurement departments these days are more specialised and recognise that guarding companies themselves can offer a range of technology solutions in addition to security officers. According to Richard Bailey of Advance, today's procurement managers have an understanding of their needs and do not rely as heavily on the supplier to make recommendations as they would have in the past.

"There is a real partnership feel to the way that companies deal with us as their guarding supplier," says Richard. "They know where the security threats are and we know what would be the best combination of personnel and technology to negate those risks."

Trained on technology

The ability of the guards to work properly with the latest technologies is an important factor in getting the balance right between human and electronic security measures on site.

"One of the trends with manned guards we are seeing at the moment (as featured in Risk UK August 2007) is to train the officers to a higher level in skills relevant to the technology that they use," says Pete. "This gives them better abilities in the use of that technology and enables them to work more professionally and more accurately."

Guarding companies can do so much more for their clients these days thanks to the development of technology and improvements in officer training, and that's good news for everyone involved, from the guard to the customer.

Traditionally guarding contracts have been won on cost, yet expectations are higher today and those expectations are being met by an increasingly confident and sophisticated industry. The adoption of new technology and how it is incorporated into the guard's duties is giving suppliers real advantages in this competitive, regulated market and providing their clients with dedicated solutions specific to their needs.

Specifying solutions

The man or machine question always comes to mind for companies looking to employ some form of security on their site or when security needs upgrading. The traditional image of the snoozing security guard has long gone, yet it faces stiff competition from sexy looking technology that works 24/7 without shift breaks.

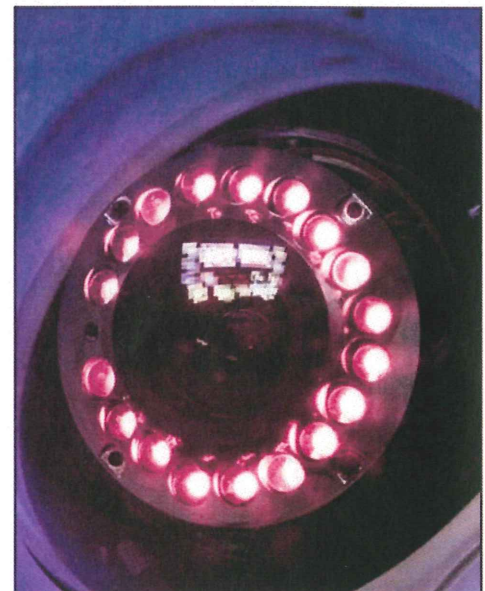
However, knowing which measures works best for a site requires some expert knowledge and if you've never spent a day with your guards in the gatehouse are you the best person to decide what they need? Talking to a supplier that provides both technology and personnel is an important factor in procuring the right combination of the two.

"Before making any decisions, companies need to have to look at the threats and areas of potential risk to their premises," says Pete Chegwin of Advance Security. "They need to define what areas are business critical to them and then look at the total cost of ownership of the security solutions available before making any purchases."

It was not unknown in the past for companies to simply install some CCTV cameras and assume that their security needs were met – an approach that Pete thinks was purely someone 'ticking boxes' rather than looking at the real issues.

The modern approach

"I have heard of companies inviting an electronic systems company in to tender because they see technology as being the modern solution," he says. "The level of manned guarding onsite does not feature in the contract and the end-user is just sold a camera system



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Technology should always complement the skills of the officer not confuse him/her. So what types of technology are guards benefiting from using?

"Thermal imaging cameras are becoming more of a cost effective tool for guards as they provide detection over a long range and therefore cut down the amount of time it takes to check that an area," explains Pete. "A couple of years ago these cameras were too expensive, but as the price has come down it has allowed companies to provide their guards with hand-held units that are a real benefit especially where a patrol would involve walking a perimeter fence, for example. It also allows the company to use one camera rather than have lots of them installed that all have to be checked individually."

Another popular hand-held solution is the ability to automatically send CCTV and thermal images to a PDA when there has been a security breach. This gives the patrolling officer a better chance of detecting and (where applicable) apprehending any intruders.

This type of technology is cutting down the number of officers required to patrol an area by giving the guards the information they need wherever they might be at the time.

"Vehicle number plate recognition is also a technology that has improved the quality of service that a security guard offers," says Richard Bailey. "Using systems that automatically log number plates and recognise vehicles on entry/exit has cut down on the time spent managing car parks and traffic movement. This gives the officer more time to spend on other duties."

Spend and save

Of course technology is not cheap and will require a certain amount of maintenance and support but, as this article has shown, it is possible to utilise technology in a way that can cut down the number of guards needed on a site. In other words spending money to save money.

"The more educated clients are well aware of the benefits of combining the skills of manned guards with the necessary equipment," say Pete. "But there are still plenty of companies that still have the old CCTV systems in place, which are totally ineffective, rather than realising that changing their equipment may lead to a reduction in the number of officers that they need."

These savings can then be invested in sector specific training for the guards to improve their technological skills in areas such as CCTV (PSS), taking security beyond the perimeter fence to deal with events before they even come onsite.

For the best security solution, man and machine need to work together, not independently, which means training for the guards and technology that is suitable for the job in hand. So the man vs. machine contest is a draw.

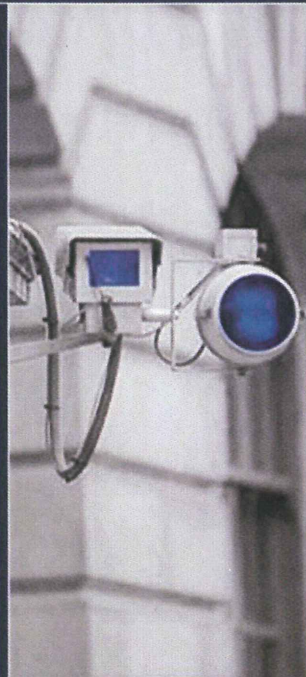


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