

Advance Security – Driving Innovation Through IT



Barry Dawson, Managing Director of Advance Security

Many UK security companies boast of industry leading IT support packages which differentiate them from the competition and provide their customer base with an unparalleled array of data, reporting and analysis. However, one of the most common complaints from dissatisfied clients and a key requirement of many tenders relates to the provision (and often lack) of accurate and consistent management information. So how does this disparity exist? Is it simply a case of perception outweighing reality?

We've never paid lip service to the benefits of IT within our business" says Barry Dawson, managing director of Advance Security. "We see it as absolutely integral to our business moving forward and over the past ten years have spent millions of pounds and countless thousands of man hours developing our IT infrastructure. The key for us is only investing where we can see a clear and precise benefit, and for us that means supporting our operational teams in their daily roles by seamlessly linking them with our office based support functions across the UK, whilst providing true 'open book' solutions for our clients."

One of the first major IT projects undertaken by Advance in the 1990s was the purchase and development of the RoleCALL system to provide an erivable roster management solution. By working closely (and exclusively in early years) alongside the software development team behind RoleCALL, Advance was able to shape the package by finding innovative uses specific to the requirements of its customers.

To this day, whilst RoleCALL is updated and reissued on a regular basis, Advance is able to rely on its own, specifically tailored programming, providing defined restrictions, automatic tracking, advanced search facilities, enhanced data analysis and bespoke colour coding. This package is unavailable to any other security operator within the UK and enables Advance Security's Control Room teams to focus clearly on their objective of providing an accessible and efficient support service for site based staff, clients and management teams.

Now equipped with a highly sophisticated roster management solution, it was natural for Advance to look next at marrying the information coming through the company's Communications Centre with payroll, invoicing, recruitment, vetting, training, uniform and all other relevant departments. Further development of Advance's internal IT infrastructure led quickly to single figure pay and invoice queries, a vetting process that could be completed in five days and a uniform

department that despatches the majority of orders within 24-hours of receiving a request.

When SIA licensing came in, Advance took its internal infrastructure to the next level again, creating a new, consolidated pre-employment department, with a bespoke IT system linking the five key aspects of the recruitment process (recruitment, vetting, training, licensing and uniform). With thousands of employees to keep track of at any one time, the new system ensured that data was un-replicated, assigned tasks routinely to individual team members and generated automated reference requests. Alongside pioneering e-based advertising the new structure has enabled the entire pre-employment process to be completed in just 10 days, an achievement unrivalled in today's competitive labour market.

A more recent, and pioneering change to Advance Security's way of working, has been its innovative use of the BlackBerry. The rise of the BlackBerry has been a widely reported phenomenon across industry over recent years and the security sector is no exception. But unlike many organisations, which use only the device's basic email and phone functions, Advance has taken its technology to the next level, joining up with a specialist telecoms provider to develop bespoke software, which allows the company's operational management teams to complete much of their day-to-day paperwork on the BlackBerry – from site visit forms, to shift patterns, key holding and mobile responses, training shifts, employee attendance, holiday requests, incident reports and job applications.

Alongside its investment in internal communications, Advance has dedicated an equal amount of time and money in communicating business critical information to its customer base. For many years the company has used an internal Portal system, which allowed the user to store key customer data and generate management information reports in line with customer specific requirements. An Action Log Tracker, often including the customer, allowed the senior management team to monitor all developments within a customer account. This was later developed further to include online Service Level Agreements and e-based Quarterly Reports highlighting all aspects of service delivery.

Most recently Advance has developed a new customer extranet with the intention of providing clients with 'at a glance' key contract information, alongside the opportunity to analyse specific areas in detail where required. Named 'Dashboard', the first stage of the new extranet has now been completed and will launch in late 2007.

With IT a long-standing priority for Advance Security, the company sees the latest initiative as merely the next step in its continued investment in innovation and new technology. Richard Bailey, sales and marketing director for Advance explains: "Advance has always seen IT as a major asset for the company. With a further two phases of the Dashboard planned for 2008 and an IT Steering Committee tasked with creating fresh initiatives on a quarterly basis year on year, we are continuing to drive innovation and provide all stakeholders with complete accessibility and an enhanced level of service."

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