

Protective security challenges

Steve Garton, director at Advent IM (www.advent-im.co.uk), addresses the issues facing the public sector.

As the economic belt continues to tighten, threats on physical aspects of buildings and public spaces also continue to rise and the necessity to protect and monitor such areas becomes all the more important. If security is not addressed in the appropriate manner, those that are responsible for and those ultimately accountable for protective security face many challenges.

These are further compounded, in that many public sector buildings and public spaces were constructed without security being considered at the initial stages of design. Consequently, 'retrofitting' security is often a more time consuming and costly process.

In an ideal world 'security by design' would be taken into account before any bricks and mortar are laid. However, many of our police headquarters, council offices, hospitals and schools, although examples of beautiful architecture, were built without enough consideration into physical security and fail to adequately address the protective security requirements forced upon us in today's society.

Encouragingly, over the recent years, security specialists and those in the public sector are coming together to address this. Here, security consultants step in to offer ways in which risks to personnel and information assets can be mitigated and how processes and procedures can tackle current and evolving threats.

As an independent consultancy we are increasingly being invited in by local and central government, emergency services and education institutes to produce a 'security health check', highlighting areas for attention. This external and unbiased review is key, as it truly reveals how well an organisation is protected and ways in which improvements can be made.

Organisations can benefit from the years of experience these independent experts bring to conducting a 'threat analysis', tapping into the modus operandi of the opportunist threat. By understanding the environment the organisation works in, who requires access to certain parts of the building or public



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space and why – a review can be tailored, based on actual threats.

By establishing points of entry and areas of concern, highly confidential data, expensive equipment and spaces where the public is at a risk from a more widespread physical threat can be identified. From here those responsible in the public sector organisation can address issues by implementing measures that complement existing solutions.

We often find that planning and disjointed strategy comes from a lack of knowledge or ill-advice from a security product provider whose true agenda is to sell as much kit as possible, rather than implement the right level of security for that particular organisation.

It isn't about how many CCTV cameras you have, or how many security guards patrol the premises; organisations may not need either! In some cases, it may be as simple as electronically 'tagging' pieces of apparatus, in others, motion detectors might be more appropriate than CCTV, or it might just need a process tweaking to make security more effective. In any event, measures should be based on actual threats and considered

holistically, not in isolation before full implementation as they are often a long-term investment. As with all high level decisions, technology must be considered as part of the wider security strategy; solutions do not work solely on their own, but as part of a 'layered' approach.

In public sector organisations, as job titles continue to merge and head counts be cut, regardless of who is 'responsible' for security, it is those at CEO level that are ultimately 'accountable'. Therefore, it is in their interest to ensure that security is everyone's responsibility so that those at the operational end can see the value. A one-liner in corporate materials or policies can really assist in getting staff buy-in.

Unfortunately, threats come in all shapes and sizes, from inside and out, but by really understanding an environment and true threats, those with protective security responsibilities can best manage procedures and processes that need to be implemented to safeguard all within the area or public space.

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