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SECURITY Training, integration, post-9/11 realities, and relationships with law enforcement have changed the way security officers work to keep your buildings safe

The **Security Officer** *of the Future* Has Arrived

By J. Michael Coleman

Push aside old notions of low-skilled security officers: The security officer of the future has arrived.

Today's security officer may be using a Segway to patrol airports, transit stations, manufacturing facilities, shopping malls, and campuses. With the advent of the broadband revolution, you might find today's highly skilled and trained security officers piloting control panels that you'd expect to see on a space shuttle, with a host of IP-connected digital applications that include closed-circuit television (CCTV), life- and fire-safety systems, and remote online access-control systems. Updates to post assignments can be communicated electronically, and training can be conducted online. Today's officer is searching for and locating potential threats to his or her customer's assets using technologically advanced surveillance systems that feature high-tech, full-motion, real-time enhanced imaging capabilities. That technology allows officers to identify potential threats quickly and discretely – from a distance – without conducting a physical pat down or alerting others to the situation and causing panic and general disruption.

Today, security officers of the future work at some of the country's busiest and most recognizable buildings, and operate complex systems that comprehensively track and control visitors. When guests arrive, building officers verify the identity of the visitor, send real-time notification of the visitor's arrival to the host, and automatically print a guest badge, enabling guest access to the building.

Additionally, post-9/11 officers use advanced integrated security solutions based on trace-detection equipment and X-ray screening systems. These systems, managed by trained officers, help safeguard both those on the front lines and the public at large, protecting buildings and transportation sys-

tems, and screening everything from a ticket to a truck.

As the role of the security officer shifts, so has the size of the industry. The Freedonia Group, an international business research company based in Cleveland, reports that the number of security officers employed is at a historically high level. In fact, the number of security officers working for private security firms is expected to increase by 3.6 percent per year, to 780,000 in 2010 from 537,000 in 2000.

State-of-the-Art Training

How can you ensure that your security officers are optimally deployed, responsible, and accountable? State-of-the-art training is crucial in keeping the burgeoning physical security workforce ready and able to take on the daily challenges they will face. The digital revolution is transforming our culture, clearly altering the way we communicate with each other. Nowhere is technology's power more visibly demonstrated than with training. If you factor in digital training that educates, empowers, and connects the vital security-officer sector, then you have a game plan for success.

Today, the security industry is making training not only better, but also more accessible. Taking advantage of technological advancements and the fact that many of today's security officers are avid computer users, security companies have created online training programs for their officers. This is especially ideal for officers who would like to continue their standard training, but work in remote locations or work atypical hours, making classroom training a challenge.

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"Integration": Security's Buzzword du Jour

As the security officer (and the security industry) continues to evolve and advance, "integration" is the buzzword du jour, with increasingly complex and disparate systems being integrated on a single platform. Different functions, including incident reporting, camera monitoring, and security officer tour systems, are all integrated to create a comprehensive program.

While the past may have seen either a security officer or a security camera, today, we often see both – not as two separate functions, but as an integrated system. Add to that an access-control system and sophisticated motion sensors, and you have an integrated system. Is this all too much? While the industry may be exploding with products, systems, and choices, the ideal is a carefully selected and integrated suite of security solutions specific to the needs of a particular location.

Property managers often say, "Yes, it's technologically advanced, but what value do I get from integration?" Not only is this a good question for the security industry to answer, but it also should probably be the *focal* question. It's important to take a balanced approach when reviewing the benefits of security-system integration and design a system that has the right elements for each location. To do this, a careful review of the facility, security policies and procedures, technology, and personnel is necessary.

Creating a security solution where all of the pieces work together is essential in creating a safe and secure environment, regardless of how simple or complex the security picture is. Today's officers are a critical piece of the security puzzle and are often our first line of defense against many threats. We must continue to be proactive about developing programs and solutions that can help them perform at their best.

Post-9/11 Realities

The development of meaningful security protocols has changed significantly since the events of Sept. 11, 2001. The economy, the state of the commercial real estate market, and the ever-present threat of future terrorist attacks have also made an impact. Operating costs have increased significantly in providing routine and emergency security personnel. Tenants have increased expectations of security programs, and we all have a responsibility to provide a safe and secure environment. All of these factors create a significant challenge to the buyer and service provider.

The security officer of the future brings a whole new set of considerations for the end-user. The property manager or security director making the security decisions should view the security officer as a professional employee. An average wage and a clean uniform are no longer enough. Today's officers should receive competitive wages, comprehensive benefits, and award-winning training. And, there should also be extensive recruiting efforts to identify quality applicants, and retention and recognition programs designed to keep them.

Safe and secure facilities are the expectation. Administrators and property managers are expected to provide protection

for building tenants, employees, and visitors. An investment in current and comprehensive security technology, married with continually trained and technologically literate officers, is the most effective and cost-efficient form of liability insurance and protection against crime.

The costs of service, insurance, employee benefits, performance tracking, wages, and training are all considerations when security providers are considered. In this new area of security, life may have become more complex for the security decision-maker, but that is for good reason. Today's security is more complex.

These considerations are a reflection of the changed perception on the part of the security director, security company, general public, and the security officers themselves. A position as security officer is now regarded as a career, not just a job. Security officers now seek additional training as a path to upward mobility. Shift and site supervisor positions are sought after by those security officers wanting to advance their security careers, and account management positions are the next step up the ladder.

Security and Law-Enforcement Partnership

The relationship with law enforcement has also progressed as well. Today's security officers work in conjunction with police officers. Many locations benefit from a mix of security and law-enforcement officers. Higher education is one market where both are often employed. A campus security or public safety director will often see the benefits of supplementing the efforts of a dedicated campus police force with security officers trained for the higher-education setting. The security officers can assume the burden of security escorts, access control, and locking buildings while the police officers focus on higher-profile matters. The two groups can work together as a team focused on safety and security.

This revolution of change in the security officer and the security industry is incredible. The security industry has raised the bar on training, wages, and benefits.

Equipped with computer skills and security training, today's security officer is not complacent; rather, he or she is technologically savvy and committed to continual training. Security officers are our first line of defense and work tirelessly for our protection. Behind the public face of the security officer lives an expertly prepared and ever-vigilant security professional who needs to be well trained and supported by cutting-edge, integrated technology. The security officer of the future should be working at your facility today. ■

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