

# Cambridge Security Launches Verified Alarm Response Service in National Markets

*David Malefsky, senior vice president of Cambridge Security Services, explains the challenges retail LP managers face with the onset of Verified Alarm Response and his company's approach to servicing a growing need in the industry.*

Verified Alarm Response (VAR) has been on the horizon for a couple of years and is the result of cash-strapped municipalities trying to conserve the costs of police units responding to commercial burglar alarms, many of which are false alarms. Local governments in more than two dozen municipalities from Dallas to Baltimore have approved measures requiring commercial alarms be "verified" prior to police dispatch.

Definitions vary of course, but *verification* inevitably involves the alarm subscriber first sending a representative to the site to verify that a burglary has indeed occurred, or is in progress. Then, and only then, will the police respond.

## Retailers' Dilemma

Traditionally, store personnel responded to store alarms believing the police would be on site when they arrived. In fact, many retailers prescribe that no employee should enter a building during an alarm condition without the police.

Now, with a growing number of municipalities effectively negating that policy, retailers are left in a quandary—how to get police response *without* putting employees at risk?

VAR is a vehicle that mitigates the inherent liability of dispatching store management personnel to potential crime-in-progress environments. Drug and jewelry stores, two retail sectors where burglar alarms are often real, must cope with the growing "foreseeability" that an employee is being put in harm's way when sent out in the middle of the night to answer an alarm call, and thus have been at the vanguard of promoting and engaging VAR services.

## Coordination and Oversight

Cambridge Security is well positioned to offer security dispatch in lieu of, or in addition to, store management. Cambridge has an established network of affiliate security companies that service security guard accounts nationwide; but those assets are largely dormant overnight. With proper



coordination and oversight, which is key to us, these resources should be able to produce a uniformed guard at 1:00 a.m. as easily as 1:00 p.m.

Prior to launching this service, it was determined that a central communication center dealing exclusively with alarm companies, separate from our 24/7 command center for security accounts, was required.

After-hours alarm incidents are time-sensitive, and ADT or Vector Alarms can not be put into a voicemail queue when reporting an incident to a first or second responder. Therefore, we engaged an affiliate security company in Dallas to be the clearing house solely for incoming calls for alarm response, and one-stop dispatching to our network security providers in subscribing markets.

Clients are afforded individual procedural latitude in the scope and method of Cambridge's response to their alarms, but the core component remains that a licensed security officer is the first responder to their alarms, within a time frame that compares favorably to that of store personnel.

The responding officer reports his on-site findings back to the communications center, which then apprises the client's representative, or the client's alarm provider, of the building's status. Based upon the findings reported, the client can then dispatch a member of management to meet the security officer and re-secure the premises, or the alarm provider can dispatch the police as directed by the client. In any case, the store employee is escorted into and out of the building by security, with or without police response.

## An Enduring Service

Cambridge Security is still studying this product offering. Our client list for VAR is small compared to our guard accounts, the markets affected remain limited, and costs and margins are being evaluated. We believe we have the framework of an enduring service, one that can improve and evolve with added participation market-by-market.

Whether a passing fancy or permanent fixture on the LP landscape, VAR presented us with a unique opportunity to study an adverse development in retail LP, and conceive a quality solution that serves to enhance Cambridge Security's standing in the retail LP industry. ■