

Gaining InSite into Your Alarm System Management

By Thom Helisek

In 1992, Vector Security began providing electronic security and fire alarm services to national retailers and gained credibility based on our ability to better manage the fundamentals of building alarm management. Even at that time, it was apparent that retail loss prevention professionals were seeking to turn their attentions inward to controlling shrinkage due to employee theft and shoplifting.



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Soon our concern was that the “common, ordinary building alarm system” would begin to take a back seat to other shrink-centric LP technologies and therefore receive less attention from LP managers. Would LP managers begin to relax their grip when it came to the routine management of their building alarms systems? If so, what steps could we take that would allow them to maintain focus on new shrink-centric technologies, while maintaining the integrity of their building alarm program?

Retail's First Line of Defense

The fact is, the building alarm system is still a retailer's “first line of defense” in an overall LP program, and it serves a distinct purpose in preventing the potential for high losses. But the day-to-day management of alarm systems, deployed and in use on a nationwide basis, can become an arduous task.

The unfortunate result is that problems with alarm systems rarely hit the radar screen unless or until there is a high loss due to complete circumvention or failure. When they occur, these incidents can be due largely to improper system operation, management, or maintenance—conditions that could have easily been remedied if someone were watching.

In response, we developed and unveiled our first version of InSite in 2000—an on-line reporting tool that allowed our customers to monitor and manage virtually all aspects of their building alarm systems, including routine signal monitoring, opening and closing information, and the status of service calls and system installations by *exception*. In this way, LP staffs could focus their attention on the problem areas without

In 2000 Vector Security released its first version of InSite, the company's web-based building alarm information management program. During September 2006, Vector released its third updated version of the website. It contains a number of important improvements that make InSite version 3 even more beneficial to its users. Vector Security's Vice President of Information Services, Thom Helisek, speaks to the history of his company's service and why programs such as InSite are becoming even more important to the nation's retailers.

needing to sort through pages and pages of unimportant information looking for the important details.

In 2004, InSite version 2 followed, allowing users to view even more information. The format was redesigned in a series of modules that users could select and access. Version 2 went far deeper into the deliverable information base, allowing users to choose the type of service they wanted information on, choose the store location or range of locations, and finally, choose the informational field they wanted. InSite delivered real-time information on the event and allowed LP managers to make alarm management decisions and address security problems on a highly proactive basis. LP managers could view problems and even see the corrective actions made by our staff members without needing to pick up the phone for updates.

The Latest Version of InSite

Our new InSite version 3 adds a fifth module—**data management**—to the mix that allows users to request specific location information and make contact list updates directly through InSite, thereby eliminating the need for a supplementary email or fax. Users can even submit system code change requests, and receive notification when the change has been made.



We also updated the accuracy of the **installation** information available from InSite by allowing it to pull data from a single source, instead of multiple sources. InSite's **search capability** was also improved to include collecting information attributable to a single site, a region, and now a city, state or zip code. And we expanded the system's available **management reports** to include three additional scopes.

While expanding the level of information available through InSite, we also focused InSite's ability to credential users to specific stores, regions, or even larger geographic locations depending upon the individual user's influence. LP managers can also screen and focus what information is available to each specific user, thereby increasing InSite's ability to present specific information in a more position-select manner.

Reducing the Incidents of False Alarms

The usage of building alarm management programs such as InSite has attained broadened appeal as retailers deploy a greater number of alarms to accommodate expansion. But a new emphasis on false alarm reduction is making this service even more valuable.

While most users rely upon these services to manage routine building alarm issues, we have been encouraging our customers to use InSite as a means to reduce the occurrences of false alarms. In a pilot project, begun in 2003, we were able to reduce one retailer's false alarm incidents by nearly 60 percent and another's by nearly 40 percent. This was accomplished by using InSite combined with additional improvements made to system designs, data management, and user training.

With the trend toward the adoption of restrictive response legislation impacting retailers nationwide, alarm system management programs, such as InSite, have become an important part of an all-encompassing methodology to reduce false alarms. To that end, InSite version 3 also incorporated

improved dispatch tracking capabilities included as a standard part of the InSite package, instead of being made available through a supplementary stand-alone web tool.

Designed by LP Professionals for LP Professionals

Since we first introduced InSite back in 2000, it's been known within the retail loss prevention community as a service that has been "designed by loss prevention professionals to service the loss prevention community." And like the retail LP community, InSite's capacities have grown throughout that time in tandem with the needs of the retail LP community and will continue to do so.

Vector Security's National Accounts Division serves nearly fifty of the most recognized names in the multi-site retail industry throughout North America. Earlier this year, Vector's efforts at reducing false alarms and unwarranted dispatches were applauded, as the company was the winner of the electronic security industry's first Police Dispatch Quality award.

Following receipt of that award, Vector's false alarm reduction efforts were again cited when The False Alarm Reduction Association honored Vector with its Achievement Award.

In May 2006, *Security Distributing & Marketing* magazine and the Central Station Alarm Association named Vector Security as Central Station of the Year for the overall quality of the company's central station services.

Vector was also named Vendor of the Year by Dollar General in both 2003 and 2004 as well as Loss Prevention Vendor of the Year in 2005 by Lowe's.

For more information about Vector Security, call 866-637-6468 or visit www.vectorsecurity.com. ■

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