



How Security Can Save You Money

BY JACK SCHMIDT AND ROBERT HASTINGS

WE WERE recently engaged to provide a security consultation at a residential building in Toronto. This building had run into problems with their security system, which had been in place since construction was completed. The property manager, in consultation with the board, brought in a consultant to locate a security integrator who could upgrade the system. The price quotes from consultant, and from the integrator, were the lowest received.

This retrofit, as it turned out, was a failure. In some ways, it was almost as bad as the system it had replaced. The consultant and the integrator were either uninterested in, or unable to, solve the problem they had created.

So, our team was contacted to address the issues. Our consultant assessed the building's security needs, and made recommendations. Working with the manager and the board, and respecting budgetary limits, our consultant

developed an RFP for security systems in the building. Our consultant managed the RFP process, selected the security integrator, and project managed the implementation. Neither our consultant nor the integrator were the lowest-priced option – but we solved the problem.

There are several morals to this story.

First, not everyone who calls themselves a “security consultant” has earned the title. And not all security integrators have the knowledge and experience needed to work in the condominium environment.

Second, the security solution that costs the least up front may end up costing substantially more down the road. It is always risky to try to cut corners now, in hopes that there will be no negative consequences.

And third, a good security consultation can identify problems before they start, and address challenges as they arise. Consequently, a good security consultation can save you a lot of money.

Certifying Bodies for Security Consultants

There are many security certifying bodies that provide individuals with rigorous testing on key areas of security. Your consultant should be certified in whichever areas are relevant to your security needs – and your consultant should be reluctant to speak on areas in which he or she is not certified. Although there are many certifying bodies in existence, a few key ones, including their areas of expertise, are listed here:

- **ISC²®** (International Information Systems Security Certification Consortium, Inc.): Information systems security, including design, audit, and assessment
- **BICSI** (Building Industry Consulting Service International): Information and communications technology certifications, including security systems design and engineering
- **ASIS International**: Security management, including physical security, crisis management and security principles
- **IFPO** (International Foundation for Protection Officers): management and delivery of security services, with a focus on security personnel, supervisors and managers

Each of these bodies provides specialized training and testing in key areas of security, and will verify the certification of anyone who claims to have one. (Additionally, some provinces have legal requirements on the credentials of security consultants. These can also be verified with the certifying bodies.)

The Benefits of Security Consultation

Every property manager knows that every dollar spent has to be spent well. There's no room for error, and no room for luxuries or casual spending. In this context, a property manager might believe that a security consultation is unnecessary. After all, whichever guarding company and technology integrator are servicing the building should, before they do anything else, conduct an assessment of the building and its needs. Once that is complete, the security provider(s) should go ahead and implement whatever security procedures and systems their experience and knowledge indicate are necessary.

Unfortunately, as the story above illustrates, there is a big difference between what security providers should do, and what they actually do. It is all too common to hear stories of buildings and property managers who have retained security providers, and the security providers have done only what they are explicitly asked to do. Even if what they are asked to do is inefficient, ineffective and too expensive for the building's needs. Even if it costs more money than an alternative solution.

Newly constructed buildings, with security programs and technology put in place by the developer, may not be in a better situation than buildings which were built many years ago. There is always a tremendous amount of construction in any major city, and to successfully sell their properties, developers often find themselves needing to create savings wherever they can. Security is usually one of the first items to be cut down, with the cheapest technologies being installed, and the cheapest security procedures created. This leaves the property manager, and condominium board, with significant burdens: contract terminations, expensive retrofits, administrative and financial costs.

Beyond just preventing wasteful security spending, a comprehensive security consultation offers other benefits that have a real impact on a property's financial well-being. Many insurance companies prefer a well-managed security program, with clear

evidence supporting each system and process put in place. Premium reductions and other savings can be realized in very short order by improving a building's security program.

Additionally, a well-managed security program will reduce the occurrence of false incidents, and allow for incident response to be structured appropriately to the nature of the occurrence. This saves on countless costs, such as reducing the number of alarm response vehicles sent to a property, as well as simplifying the administration of the security program.

And last but not least, a security consultation provides a property manager with a skilled consultant who can manage the process of selecting and implementing improvements to the building's security posture.

What to Expect from Your Security Consultant

The security consultation industry is largely unregulated. (Whether this is a good thing or not is a matter of some debate.) Unlike security guards, who must have licences and be trained, or security integrators, who must have IT and other certifications, security consultants can be almost anyone. (Some provinces do require licences, but requirements are quite loose.) Which means that property managers should exercise some caution before selecting a consultant. Frequent media appearances and a charming demeanour are not enough.

In addition to formal certification, your consultant should have some degree of experience in the specific domains of security relevant to your building. This can come in the form of formal education, such as advanced or graduate university degrees, or in the form of prior satisfied clients or a combination of the two. While more experienced consultants will charge higher rates, they are also able to provide a more thorough evaluation of your building and devise more creative solutions to your security challenges.

And, finally, your consultant should inspire trust. This individual will be providing you with a series of recommendations for improving your building's security, and saving you money. These recommendations will

only be of value if they are followed, and they will only be followed if you can trust the knowledge, experience and commitment of the person who wrote them. Your security consultant should be a partner who is dedicated to keeping you and your tenants happy and safe.

In Conclusion

Overall, a skilled, experienced security consultant can keep your security program on track and on budget. A consultant can help you better understand your building and its needs, and provide guidance through the ever-evolving security market. By engaging a good security consultant, you will ensure that the dollars spent on security are spent as effectively as possible.

And remember: security problems can lead to significant financial consequences down the road. Choosing the wrong consultant can create problems rather than solving them. The cheapest option is not always the best. ❖



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