

Tips for Choosing a Security Provider

Choosing providers for the security of your business and staff is central to an effective plan. Consider the following key points:

- Security services you pay for should be based on an identified risk, which is based on the nature and vulnerability of what is being protected.
- Determine your needs by using the security checklist and checking your insurance company's requirements.
- Seek at least three quotes from locally based security providers.
- Ask each representative to offer a solution to your problems.
- Consider purchasing the latest technology available and find out what is currently being developed.
- Ensure you provide your alarm monitoring company with precise alarm response instructions.
- Once you have chosen your provider(s), regular maintenance and audits are essential on product and services.

Insurance

Insurers may now require commercial premises to have a professionally monitored alarm to ensure someone responds to all alarm activations. This is dependent on the type of business, premises and vulnerability. Ensure your chosen company provides the level of Public Liability Insurance appropriate to the risk faced by your business.

Alarms Systems and Monitoring

An alarm is an important part of the security system that protects you, your staff and your premises. There is huge diversity in the type and quality of alarms available to businesses and the right choice will depend on your unique circumstances.

Useful options:

- Duress codes and Panic buttons
- Alerts to your cell phone
- The ability to either arm or disarm your alarm remotely
- Emailed reports about activations and faults
- Real-time CCTV monitoring
- Remote Patrols or 'Cyber Tours'
- Monitoring of other alarms (heat, fire, refrigeration units)

Instructions to the Alarm Monitoring Company

When your alarm is activated, the procedure undertaken by the monitoring company is based on your instructions. Ensure they are clear and cover all possibilities. This is often where communication breaks down, so consider the following points:

- Upon alarm activation, phone the premise first before contacting key holder or sending the patrol?
- What if they cannot get hold of the key holder? Dispatch the nearest guard?
- Different responses for multiple numbers of zones activated? One zone may indicate a false alarm (birds, mice or insects) but two may indicate a more serious outcome.
- Alarm disarm out of usual hours, but response company not notified by staff member - should the monitoring station call the key holder, send a patrol? Does the operator call the site and obtain details of the person causing the activation?
- How do you want false alarms handled?

Audits and Maintenance

Check response times for all of your alarm activations.

If you have site patrols, visit the site at night on a few occasions and walk with the officer. Gaining an understanding of what the officer has to do, problems faced, etc., will enable you to either verify or modify your security plan.

These patrols should take an agreed amount of time. If a reasonable time ascertained is five minutes then you need to know if it is taking the patrolperson more or less time than that. If more, it can be a comfort stop for the guard or could be that the guard is in areas he has no right to be. It is in your interest to keep an eye on this.

And don't forget to regularly check your security arrangements with your provider, because of staff changes in both parties. Reviews would be recommended every six months to one year.

Key-holders

Your choice of keyholders should be considered carefully. It is a position of responsibility and requires appropriate attributes. You should also consider issues of availability and proximity to your premises. Key-holders need to be available at all times to answer calls from the alarm monitoring service.

Key-holders should:

- Have a cell phone and torch when they attend the site.
- Ensure someone else knows they are attending, arrival time etc.
- Not enter the site on arrival until escorted by the security officer.
- Never confront offenders on own.
- Stay in car with the doors locked and watch and advise the Police immediately using 111.
- Have a roster so that alternate key-holders have weeks on and off and don't get stale.
- Have a back up if the primary key-holder cannot be raised.
- Have preset phone numbers for security patrols and monitoring companies.

Actions after a Break-in

Remember that your site is now a crime scene. Leave things as they are until the Police arrive. The cost of boarding up broken doors and windows is an insurance issue and can be handled in most cases by your response company – you do not need to be there. There will likely be additional charges for this service.

Systems Maintenance

False alarms (user error or malfunction) can cause alarm response operators to be blasé with activations for premises in which false alarms regularly occur. Always have your system checked so the reason for the false alarm is established.

Selecting your Providers

It really doesn't matter where the monitoring company is located, however it may be more effective to choose a locally-based alarm response company.

Check the following:

- Availability of online account access to view alarm history and manage your company's detail.
- The ability to change providers if you either need to or wish to.
- Whether you can choose your own alarm response attendance company.

Alarm Response Times

The time it takes a security patrol to respond to your alarm is often the most frustrating issue faced by a business.

Security companies' staff are conducting regular checks on sites throughout the night and weekends, so many factors can affect their response time e.g. traffic, multiple activations in area, etc.

Determine an agreed response time and what the consequences would be if they don't respond within that time.

Monitoring / Patrol Response - One Company or Two?

Some patrol companies have a policy that they will only attend alarms that they monitor and vice versa. Using the same company to monitor and patrol can have advantages e.g. faster dispatch due to one less phone call and can ensure one company takes responsibility and therefore no 'passing the buck' when accountability is required.

However, using a separate provider for each of the monitoring and attendance duties could allow each service provider to advise you if the other service provider has 'dropped the ball'.

In general you should retain the ability to shop around for the right attendance company that suits your requirements and have the assurance of total disclosure of any patrol attendance failures and vice versa.