

NEWS RELEASE October 2009

Installers take control



The latest generation of IP alarm systems offer security installers and their customers much more than just cost savings, writes Lodewijk van Ommeren of Chiron Security Communications

Discussion about 21CN - what will or won't happen - may be fascinating, worrying, or confusing, depending on who you are. Everyone has an opinion on it.

But it should not distract security installers from the real opportunities that are now open to them.

With IP-alarm systems winning favour from customers, ARCs, insurers and independent testing houses, installers can now have more control than ever over how they serve their customers.

Forward-looking firms can use IP to build secure, ongoing business without worrying about what the traditional players in the industry are doing.

They can work more efficiently, be self-reliant, and deliver a smoother service to their customers.

Oh, and they can be a lot more profitable too...

On cost alone the case for alarms-over-IP is compelling – switching to IP you are immediately around £200 better off, per year, for each PSTN line you dispense with.

That figure quickly multiplies and becomes very worthwhile if you have lots of sites to monitor and protect. This is just one reason why retailers, banks and similar organisations with many branches to protect have switched to alarms-over-IP.

It's also, among other factors, why national alarms companies are now actively promoting IP solutions to their customers.

If you are handling a lot of monitored alarm lines then the cost advantages of IP are worth having.

But the immediate saving on the rented lines is just the start, which means the benefits are of increasing value to smaller installers too.

The latest generation alarms-over-IP systems offer security installers the reality – not just the prospect - of a whole new business model. It's a way of working that's more profitable and more efficient.



Competitive advantage

While your competitor spends time, money and effort travelling to a customer's premises to diagnose a fault, you can do the same job remotely from your PC; while your competitor spends a day touring sites for scheduled maintenance checks, you can do the same job in an hour; and when a customer calls you to report a problem, you can give them an answer within minutes.

In terms of the bottom line, you can take care of more customers with fewer man-hours. You can also provide a smoother service.

When your engineer does have to go on site to fix something, he'll already know pretty well what the problem is before he arrives, so he'll be better prepared.

Previously, for smaller installers the main down-side of IP-alarms has been the idea that it is difficult or inconvenient to switch.

If you already have a profitable, efficient business then why go through the hassle of changing it?

It takes time and money to learn new skills; there will be teething problems to overcome; there will be disruption (sure, just like there was switching away from letters and faxes in favour of email...).

But today's best-in-class IP alarm systems solve this problem too.

Helpful features

Taking inspiration from helpful features that we've all got used to using on our PCs, the latest generation equipment includes 'wizards' which guide the engineer through the connection process step-by-step.

This is just one of the features which have been made possible by the development of diallers featuring touch-screens.

In fact these wizards reveal how simple the commissioning process really is – the engineer is prompted to enter just 3 pieces of information in order to get the secure, dual-path connection up and running.

Self-sufficient

With the latest units the engineer is totally self-sufficient. He doesn't need a laptop nor even need to talk to a third party to complete the job, so he's not restricted to doing site visits in business hours.

So if you have to do a job out-of-hours you're not dependent on how much support your equipment provider offers, or whether anyone is free to talk to you when you happen to call.

Instead, feedback on the unit's screen assures you that you have done the job correctly and that the system is fully working.



Not site specific

Recent developments mean that good IP diallers are no longer site-specific either; they don't have to be programmed in advance and used for specific jobs – they can be used for any job and engineers can be re-directed to different sites as needed.

This flexibility brings the technology much more in-step with the demands of the real world.

For example, using a dialler that was pre-programmed and site specific allowed no change of plans.

What happened if a specific engineer carrying a specific dialler couldn't make it to a site for some reason? Then the customer would have to wait.

What happened if the wrong dialler was taken to the wrong job? Then it would cost time and effort to sort it out.

But with interchangeable equipment there's no longer a logistical challenge.

Keeping up-to-date

Another advance inspired by the world of personal computing is the ability of the latest systems to automatically update themselves every time updated software is introduced.

These 'refreshable' units don't go out of date and the installer doesn't need to keep checking them to be sure of this. One press of a button is enough to ensure the latest firmware is fully automatically downloaded to the unit.

Meeting user expectations

Many technology-literate users are already looking towards the next step, keen to unleash the opportunities which are clearly offered by IP.

They want detailed reporting so they can analyse exactly what's happening in individual premises or parts of their estate; they want to keep the total cost of ownership low and expect remote diagnostics and maintenance. Most of all they want to work with service providers who are as keen to be efficient and forward looking as they are.

Chiron Security Communications has been in the first wave of the IP alarms adoption for the last six years (as a UK-based company we are in the happy position of manufacturing Europe's best-selling IP-alarms solution).

We now see the IP-alarms market pushing into a new stage of development, with smarter technology that is easier to install and use and offers many more advantages than just price.



For installers and their customers it has never been easier to specify, and get installed, the IP system that they want.

Today's best-in-class system that will give you greater control, more management data and reports, be just as robust as the old fixed line, and will save you a lot of money every year.

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