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Security: Something No Hotel Can Ignore

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Security has always been a key issue for hoteliers. The events of the past seven months have only heightened awareness for proper security and the need for upgrades in equipment, where required.

Technology plays a major part in meeting today's security requirements, but there are other important factors in implementing effective security measures.

Bill McShane, director of security for Manhattan East Suite Hotels, is a leading authority on hotel security and fire safety. A former special agent with the FBI, he has over 30 years of experience in all aspects of public and private security management.

McShane emphasizes that the people link to technology is critical in the successful use of any security system. The attitude of the hotel staff must be oriented toward security and the proper use of the equipment that is installed.

A case in point is the use of closed circuit television (CCTV). Even the newest, most sophisticated equipment must be monitored, and when there is an incident, a prompt review of the recorded media is required.

CCTV certainly is not a new platform. The earliest models consisted of a camera fitted with a special lens and connected to a monitor (a television without broadcast reception capability). Systems were later created that added multiple cameras that used switches to rotate the images that were shown on the monitor.

The next enhancement came in the form of a video recorder, which captured images on videotape. The original models were reel-to-reel, just like the original audio tape recorders. Later models utilized the same type of video cartridge used by VCRs; in fact, the unit was a modified VCR.

Today's systems include all the above features along with digital color cameras and images recorded to the hard disk of a personal computer. These images can be retrieved by various criteria and can be archived onto digital audiotape (DAT), CD (RW), DVD or any other digital media. Since retrieval from hard disk is random and not sequential, the time required to review images is greatly reduced.

It is important to understand the difference between time-lapse recording and full-motion recording. Time-lapse is actually full motion, but the recording speed is fewer frames per second. The advantage of this technique is a significantly greater length of time can be recorded on either tape or hard drive; however, if the frames per second are set too low a subject could actually pass through an area and not be recorded.

There are many CCTV systems in the marketplace including those from JVC, Panasonic and Sony.

Most systems offer high-resolution digital cameras with a motion detector terminal output included. A zoom lever is used to adjust the range of fixed cameras. Other types of cameras feature automatic zoom lens operation. Day and night operations are programmed to detect light levels. Some cameras are infrared sensitive for use in virtual darkness. Digitization of the signal enhances image quality.

The recording devices use a digital hard drive to store images. Some recorders can store up to 160GB online, with even more capacity available with optional add-on features.

An Ethernet network interface device is available for LAN, WAN or Internet connections. This allows monitoring with a conventional Internet browser from any network connection.

It is becoming more common for CCTV services to be offered in a package with other applications. Internet-enabled video security is a product offered by StayOnline (www.stayonline.net). The company is a provider of high-speed Internet access for hotels and provides CCTV as part of its services.

The service can use existing cameras and multiplexer by adding a digitizer and installing a video server (PC). The server has an Internet connection that provides recording. The cameras can be monitored from any PC equipped with an Internet connection and a Web browser. This is accomplished by logging on to a secure Web site. This approach offers several benefits including no archiving required on property, providing an alert should cameras be moved or disconnected, and the ability to survey multiple properties from a central location.

TimeLox (www.timelox.com) is now offering a network camera approach along with its most advanced electronic locking system. Integrated with the TimeLox DC-One system, it has the capability for a security officer to hear a doorbell on a computer, view a live picture of the person at the door, and open the door lock from the computer. The system can use either the hotel's local area network or an Internet connection.

The cameras are manufactured by Axis Communications, a worldwide supplier of security and other products. Network cameras have their own IP address and connect directly to a network without using a multiplexer or digitizer. More advanced cameras can detect motion, alarm input/output signals and even send e-mails.

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McShane emphasizes that no matter what approach is taken for utilizing CCTV, proper installation is essential. The correct wiring must be used, cable-TV COAX for older, analog cameras and CAT-5e for more modern, digital cameras. Wiring

requirements may vary, however, so the installer must verify the type of wire required with the camera's manufacturer.

Training is also a key element to the successful installation of any security equipment. The staff must have an in-depth knowledge of all features and functions.

While CCTV is an integral part of hotel security, guestroom locks and safes are equally important. Below is a sampling of some available products.

SAFLOK's (www.saflok.com) Select MT lock offers many attractive features. The lock has the ability to use magnetic stripe, smartcard or memory card technology. The lock itself is a robust one-inch, steel reinforced bead bolt with a three-fourths of an inch latch bolt, creating a double deadbolt effect. An optional automatic deadbolt is also available.

SAFLOK will be introducing a wireless lock access network at this year's HITEC in Chicago. This will convert existing battery-operated locks into online network access control systems. It will also permit two-way communication with the locks for interrogation as well as for the lock communicating that its battery is low.

Security Innovations, Incorporated (SII) specializes in online and real-time access control systems for the lodging industry. SII provides security products that integrate standard electrical and building specifications.

Current products include Access-Plus[®] online access control featuring Sensor-Lock deadbolt technology, credit card keys and the ability to choose any combination of reader technologies. Options include energy management, paging alerts and secondary annunciation of smoke detection. Future releases will include CCTV integration, property mapping and automatic alarm paging.

VingCard (www.vingcard.com) offers two significant products, The DaVinci Locking System and the Elsafe Infinity Series of electronic safes. The contemporary design of these products has bridged the gap between form and function. As an example, the DaVinci series locks come in six different finishes and also offer six different handle designs. This hardware is modular, therefore, offering many different configurations in both appearance and functionality.

The Infinity collection of safes feature a Windows CE-based PDA that can interrogate the safe and provide a 100 event audit trail. The safes can be equipped with a multi-voltage outlet so that laptops can be recharged while secured in the safe.

One technology that has been proposed for hotels is the use of biometrics to profile guests and identify those that may be involved in some form of criminal activity. These technologies have no place in the hospitality industry. They are intrusive and subject to error, not to mention expensive. McShane suggests better screening of identification will help alleviate these types of concerns.

Local security requirements can vary, so address these concerns as well. Security is critical in today's environment, be sure your hotel is not behind.

Bill McShane is endorsed by the American Society of Industrial Security as a Certified Protection Professional (CPP), the Security Management Institute as a Certified Security Executive (CSE), the American Hotel & Lodging Association as a Certified Lodging Security Director (CLSD), is a member of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, and is licensed by the state of New York as a private investigator.

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