

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE MONITORING RESPONSE PLANS



As director of security solutions and strategic channel management for Diebold Security, Jacky Grimm is responsible for facilitating electronic security products, creating new security solutions and leading Diebold's award-winning security monitoring business. During nearly 30 years at Diebold, Grimm has helped establish the company's monitoring business and grow it into one of the models for the industry. In 2009, Diebold was recognized by Frost & Sullivan as the Commercial Monitoring Services Company of the Year.

Jacky Grimm
DIRECTOR SECURITY SOLUTIONS
 Diebold Incorporated

The following Diebold column was originally published in the Today's Systems *Integrator* e-newsletter on February 16, 2010.

Before the Alarm Sounds

An alarm sounds at one of your customer's locations. It's time for your monitoring station to spring into action. But will the response be appropriate for the event? Will it meet your customer's expectations?

These are critical questions to address when developing and refining response plans for security monitoring clients. They also apply when monitoring systems such as video surveillance equipment, computer networks and energy resources. Carefully crafted response plans improve security, minimize risk and reduce false alarm fines.

Regardless of what's being monitored, the development of effective response plans entails defining event-specific protocols, ensuring consistent response and maintaining flexibility.

Setting Appropriate Response Protocols

Every business and every alarm scenario is different. Therefore, the response plan must match the organization, the system being monitored and the nature of the event. Appropriate plans consider whether events are critical, define response times accordingly and outline notification protocols by contact and method.

Consider the classification of life safety events. Fire alarms have always been time-sensitive events requiring immediate response from monitoring centers – within seconds – to alert first responders. But today, life safety classifications may extend to monitoring elements you might not expect, such as food storage coolers. While a cooler malfunction may not require the same response as a fire, it may require quick verification of the problem and appropriate action to ensure the storage temperature of the food doesn't threaten the safety of those who will consume it.

Internet Protocol (IP) video surveillance systems enable monitoring centers to visually investigate alarms in real time. Responses may be based on what the center observes. But what if a camera fails? Response plans should include contingencies for this type of situation, and the action may vary by time of day. An interrupted signal at noon may indicate a broken camera. After business hours, it may mean the camera has been compromised.

Response protocols should always factor in applicable laws and regulations. For example, numerous municipalities have enacted enhanced call verification (ECV) laws that mandate monitoring stations to place two calls to verify alarms before contacting police. Typically, the first call is to the site and the second is to a designated person who can verify the alarm. Many jurisdictions accept video confirmation as the second call. Such options should be considered during the development of the response plan.

Finally, it's always good practice to test response plans, especially unique ones. Conduct one planned test and one unannounced test to determine how the plan works and how well the monitoring center responds.

Delivering a Consistent Response to Every Event

Once response plans are solidified, monitoring centers must follow established protocols every time an alarm sounds.

Consistent response is critical, even when responding to alarms that may be false. If a cleaning crew frequently trips an access door alarm, monitoring centers must respond in the same manner, every time. The one time the nature of the alarm isn't verified could be the time a criminal is attempting to break in.

To ensure your monitoring center delivers consistent responses, establish response metrics. Any response variances should be identified to determine whether protocols need to be adjusted or personnel need additional training.

A stable and trained workforce also helps to ensure consistency. Monitoring center personnel should have appropriate Underwriters Laboratories (UL) and/or Factory Mutual (FM) certifications. CSAA Five Diamond central stations guarantee that all responders have completed minimal training requirements.

Striving for Flexibility

Response plans should not be set in stone. Customers should be able to consult with their monitoring center when their threat or physical environment changes. And they should have the flexibility to adjust plans quickly – even if it's just temporarily.

If a customer's facility is being renovated, for example, the monitoring center should be able to account for deactivated alarms or cameras. If a rash of burglaries has occurred near a customer's business, the customer may choose to shift intrusion alarm response from two-call verification to immediate police notification.

Ensuring Client Satisfaction

Response plans shouldn't be an afterthought. Consider them even during the planning stages of a security system to ensure sensors and other devices are installed at every critical location. A monitoring center can only respond to the signals it receives, so it's important to develop the right security infrastructure to meet the needs of the environment.

As security integrators, we must be attentive to our clients' monitoring needs. Developing comprehensive response plans customized to the client, facility and event is a step in the right direction. Remaining consistent, yet flexible, in our responses goes a long way toward ensuring our customers' security, and their satisfaction.



Diebold, Incorporated
 Post Office Box 3077, Dept. 9-B-16, North Canton, Ohio 44720-8077
 800.999.3600 USA | 888.545.9444 Canada | 330.490.4000 International
 productinfo@diebold.com | www.diebold.com

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