

Time to Rally Our Frontline Troops in the False Alarm Battle

Although it may not be making front-page news, make no mistake about it, the alarm industry has its own war brewing on the home front. The enemy is the false alarm, or more precisely the false dispatch, and the frontline soldier is the alarm installer.

While we can probably thank the international war on terrorism for bringing this issue to the forefront, it has been around for more than a decade. Only now, false dispatches have to be dealt with, and dealt with swiftly.

This month, we are putting our calculators and schematics aside to take a serious look at what the alarm dealer can do to help bring this problem under control.

Resources Are Out There

According to the April 2002 *Security Sales & Integration* Security Scanners Web poll, more than half of us believe that the majority of alarm dealers are not doing enough to combat false alarms. This battle will not be

won with a magic bullet, but can be fought with a variety of available tools and resources.

Many standards and programs have already been put into place. For example, there is the UL ANSI/SIA CP-01 control panel standard from the Security Industry Association (SIA), and the Installation Quality (IQ) Certification operational guidelines program from the National Burglar and Fire Alarm Association (NBFAA).

Other relevant organizations include the Alarm Industry Research and Education Foundation (AIREF), False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA), International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and Law Enforcement and Security Alliance (LESA). Other programs of note are the Coordinated Alarm Reduction Effort (CARE, which is being turned into the Security Industry Alarm Coalition (SIAC), Model States and Model Cities.

New Panels Can Help

Most major panel manufacturers now have at least one brand that has incorporated the ANSI/SIA CP-01 false alarm standard to a UL-Listed panel. These panels now include many significant false alarm reduction features.

Some of these features are remote audible exit/entry delay; swinger shutdown; cross-zoning; recent closing transmission; double hit timer; communications delay; exit fault audible; stable power up; auto stay; cancel verification; and exit delay reset.

However, the feedback I get from the field is that dealers, either due to disregard or lack of understanding, are not using many of these new capabilities. Yes, features like adding a remote exit/entry delay audible take extra installation time and money, but, if it is not done, customers may soon



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be paying more for monitoring and dispatching.

NBFAA Pushes IQ Program

The NBFAA-promoted IQ program — which has evolved with input from organizations such as the Central Station Alarm Association (CSAA), SIA, AIREF and IACP — currently has 120 member companies.

“The IQ program taps the wealth of industry and public safety knowledge and experience to create guidelines, which are proven to deliver quality, false alarm-resistant systems. The goal is to provide a tangible benefit for those companies that do business in the alarm industry the right way,” says Melissa Maranda, NBFAA government affairs coordinator.

10 Guidelines Make Sense

The IQ program provides the alarm dealer with many valuable and proven guidelines, as summarized below.

Company policies — Form an IQ Quality Control Team to identify, prevent and/or eliminate false alarms. Encourage standardization of system indicators and operation. Create a policy for affirming test mode operation.

User Training — Provides user instruction on operating and accidental alarm procedures. Assist customer in filling out the “IQ Certification Checklist.” Show and provide user with testing procedure documents. Give the customer a five-day “training period” option in which the central station will not dispatch.

Employee Training — Provides ongoing training programs for the sales staff and train-the-trainer program for those training end users.

System Design — Have a trained



Installers wearing the Installation Quality (IQ) emblem follow procedures that ensure optimal, false alarm-resistant installations.

Tech Talk

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system designer. Provide an equipment checklist for sales personnel. Identify all power-consuming devices. Design specially for the presence of pets.

Equipment — Equipment to be UL Listed, FM- or IRI-approved, or equivalent. Install per manufacturer's specifications. Panic and medical alarms to be audible with double but-

ton devices. Use false alarm controls per UL ANSI/SIA CP-01 standard.

Installation — Installation, including grounding, must be per UL, FM, NFPA and NEC standards and codes.

Perform a complete test of the system, including backup power operations, after installation. Use the IQ Certification Checklist at the end of each installation.

Monitoring— System monitored by

IQ-certified company. All signals promptly verified by central station (CS) before police dispatch. Establish CS/installation company communications in order to investigate alarm conditions.

End-User Training Is Key

As we have seen from FARA statistics, user error accounts for as much as 70 percent of all false alarms. It has been identified by several surveys that adequate and complete user training is needed to reduce false alarms.

Simply showing a customer how to enter their alarm code should not be considered satisfactory end-user training. So how do we properly train the end user?

First, the alarm company must have a consistent and ongoing train-the-trainer program. The person responsible for training the end user, often the installer, must understand and be able to implement consistent end-user training.

This involves basics such as explaining the objective; giving visual and audible demonstrations; having the user perform various hands-on system operational exercises; providing support material and handouts; asking timely and pertinent questions to see if the material is comprehended; and collecting a completed training evaluation form. Take a look at the 12-step program outlined on this page.

A prepared trainer can expect to spend 30 minutes to 60 minutes on a typical residential training presentation. An unprepared trainer may actually spend more time training the customer, and omit important information. Today, there are training organizations such as TrainKing (www.trainking.com) that can supplement a dealer's end-user training via the Internet and online training modules.

Remember, a well-trained end user will feel confident about their system, use it the way it was designed, and, most of all, be a happy customer. .

12-Step End-User Training Plan

1. Overview

Carefully planned training provides user confidence, satisfies increasing false alarm management demands of police, fire departments. Keep it simple, nontechnical. Avoid trade acronyms like *swinger*, *internal trnp*. Use visuals, hands-on exercises.

2. Preliminary Material

In advance, give the customer a copy of user information (from manual is OK), training agenda, false alarm information, local alarm ordinances and any other relevant material.

3. Training Objectives

Define to the customer what they should expect to know and understand as a result of your training. For example, "The objective of this training is to orient the customer to the proper and responsible operation of their alarm system:"

4. Alarm System & Community

Congratulate the owner on his or her purchase and commitment to safer neighborhood. From the outset, a trainer should instill a sense of responsible alarm ownership. Provide information about the role alarm systems play in the community.

5. How System Works

Provide a diagram of alarm system and components, with alarm points documented and explained. Use zone indicators on the panel to illustrate detection. Explain how sensors and controls work

6. Daily Operations

Create several "away and stay" arming scenarios and step user through them. Interject false alarm prevention steps. Make sure the customer demonstrates proficiency in operating the system before continuing. Ask questions.

7. Communication, Verification, Dispatch

Illustrate how alarm system reporting and supervision works, proper alarm verification, police/fire dispatching.

8. Testing Procedures

Provide testing document, review testing procedures.

9. Preventing False Alarms

Review the methods for eliminating false alarms. Have your customer simulate scenarios like too long exiting or forgetting a code.

10. Final Checklist

Use a checklist to make sure everything's covered. The document can incorporate material like the IQ False Alarm Checklist.

11. Questions

Do one last check for questions. Give customer contact information should any questions arise later.

12. Training Evaluation

Politely request that a training/customer service evaluation form be completed. Feedback is very important.