

Untrained Trainers Are Derailing Our Efforts

I want to tell you a story about an installer; let's call him Herby. An important, mysterious tool is missing from Herby's tool belt. This is not a tool that you can drill or cut with, or even put your hands on. However, it may be the most important tool for making our alarm installations complete, our customers happy and substantially reducing false dispatches.

Every security dealership should be providing this essential tool to their installers, but almost none do. This important tool is *training*. Not technical training as we typically know it, but the trainer skills needed to understand the hows and whys for properly training an alarm system end user. Without them, installers like Herby are ill equipped to elevate and maintain the professionalism and reputation of our industry.

Recently, I had the opportunity to give a presentation to the members of the Central Station Alarm Association

(CSAA) at their annual North American Technology Symposium and Exhibit (NAMTSE) in Orlando, Fla. The talk was titled, "Dr. Jekyll - Mr. Hyde, the Technician to Trainer Transformation."

The material I delivered explained how alarm companies could provide installers with the necessary tools needed to properly train their alarm system end users. Since the talk was so well received, I have decided to share some of this critical insight with our "Tech Talk" readers.

More to Teaching Than Knowledge

Many widely publicized alarm industry studies have shown that the root cause for false alarm dispatches is end-user error. (see graph below). But who is typically responsible for this end-user training?

Recently, that question was posted online to our readership. Each month, *Security Sales & Integration* presents a Security Scanner® survey on its



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BOB'S TIPS

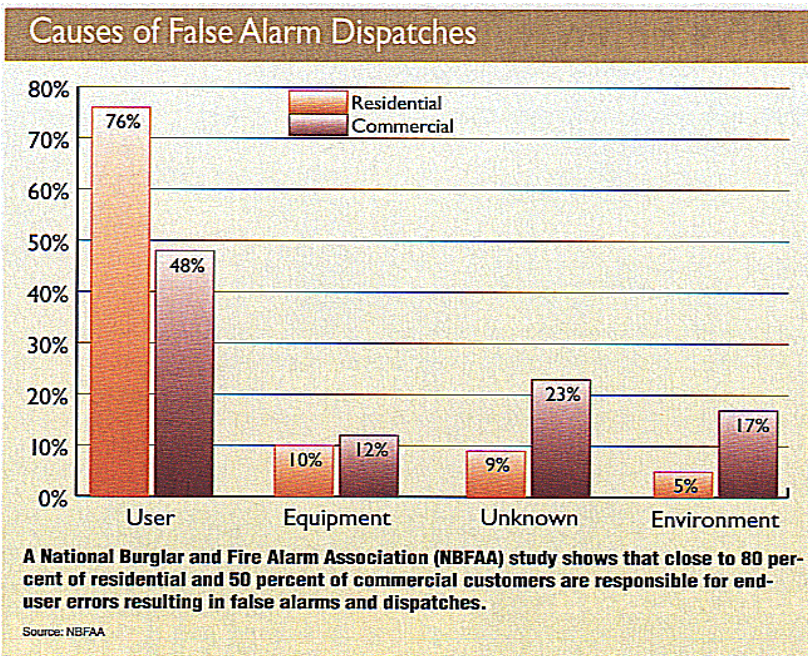
- Assign a training coach to your dealership.
- Test customer by having them demonstrate critical alarm operations.
- Promote your alarm user training program with local authorities.
- Request more training material support from manufacturers.
- Remember, "Talking Ain't Training"

Web site (www.securitysales.com). This past May, the question was, "When completing an installation, who in your company is responsible for training the customer on how to use their alarm system?" The findings show overwhelmingly that the installer is responsible for this increasingly critical task

Most service managers will comment, "Why make such a big deal about training end users? My technical staff knows the system inside and out, and can surely train a novice alarm user on how to operate it." This is the belief that most people in the technical community have and, on the surface, may seem perfectly valid. However, training professionals will tell you this is the biggest training myth of all.

First, and most importantly, we must understand that just because a person technically understands how a system operates, does NOT mean they can easily train a novice user. We must understand the subtle differences between how technicians, or what trainers refer to as subject matter experts (SME), and novice users learn and retain new information.

When training a customer to arm a system from a keypad, the installer will typically declare, "Check your system status. If it is green, then press



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this combination to arm the system and make sure to leave your place in less than 30 seconds.”

Since the SME has done these steps thousands of times and knows this procedure in his or her sleep, it appears that he or she is making a very easy-to-understand statement to the customer. The installer, however, should be asking himself or herself, “Did the customer understand what I said and will they remember it?” The answer to the above example is NO.

The customer is quietly saying, “What does a green status mean? What if it is not green? How can I make it green? What does ‘arm a system’ mean? What happens if it takes longer than 30 seconds for me to leave?” Well, you get the picture. Novice users learn new information in a sequential manner and, therefore, must learn this material in clear meaningful steps.

Here lies the training communications dilemma. The installer is describing how to operate the system in huge chunks of information, but the customer is trying to digest it one simple step at a time. A big challenge for the installer/trainer is to step back and deliver these instructions a step at a time to the customer. Remember what it was like when you had to learn new things. The more of an expert the in-

staller is, the more challenging this task will be.

Doing Reinforces What Is Heard

I recommend someone in your organization be designated as the company’s training coach. This could be a service manager who would then conduct role-playing training sessions to sharpen these training skills. This person should become associated with a professional training organization, such as the American Society of Training and Development (www.astd.org).

ASTD has local chapters throughout the United States and would be a valuable resource to the designated training coach. One additional training resource I highly recommend is a book called “Telling Ain’t Training,” which is available from ASTD.

Once we understand how to properly deliver this operating material to the customer, how do we know they will remember it? One of my favorite training mottos comes from the ancient philosopher Confucius. He stated, “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.” In other words, when training, the more the customer’s senses are used, the better the retention rate. As we have seen, the installer has many responsibilities. The installer must make sure to not only tell the customer what to do when operating an alarm system, but

to have the customer demonstrate and tell the installer how to do a procedure such as arming and disarming the system. The customer must also be taken through problem scenarios like what to do when a false alarm occurs or how to prevent a false dispatch. If this is done, the customer will understand and remember how to responsibly operate his or her alarm system.

Make sure there are hands-on exercises for the customer. Ask plenty of questions to see if the customer truly understands the material. Remember, “Talking Ain’t Training” and “Listening Ain’t Learning.”

Industry Needs to Improve Materials

Implementing a good customer-training program will provide many benefits to a dealership. It will make the installer’s job easier and the customer happier, thereby improving both customer and employee retention. By having a training program, you will know the customer is getting consistent quality training.

When this training program is documented and implemented, it will also provide the dealer with a great community public relations tool. The dealer’s commitment to training responsible alarm users can be presented to local police and fire authorities as a sign of your company’s commitment to reducing false dispatches.

The security industry needs to do much more in assisting the dealer with customer training. I would like the industry to finally get serious and mandate a “*training call to arms*”. Trainers, such as the installer, need better customer-training tools. Manufacturers, service providers and industry organizations need to produce tools that are visually stimulating, easy to use and understand. Today’s boring full-ten alarm user’s manual should finally become a thing of the past.

