Tech Talk
With Bob Dolph

Designing a Good First Impression

Often, the first impression a systems dealer or integrator makes with a new client is with their presentation material. The quality of a project proposal can present a security company as an amateur or a professional. This in turn has a considerable influence on whether the customer will do business with the dealer and how much markup they will approve

In the past, preparing quality project drawings often required a dealer to make a considerable commitment of both money and manpower. The dealer would either need to staff a Computer Aided Design (CAD) department or be charged for the service by a third party design firm. Additionally, leading design programs, such as AutoCAD, had a large learning curve to master.

As a consequence of those obstacles, only larger integration companies were able to provide project drawings. Nowadays, thanks to some very creative software and the power of today's PCs, the CAD playing field has been leveled.

I have handpicked three versatile CAD software programs that can help make you a star on that playing field. Each program was selected for the valuable features and benefits it can provide to up-and-coming integrators.

The first package, Smartdraw, provides an economical solution to an alarm dealer's basic drawing and design concerns. The next program, D-Tools, while moderately priced, provides enough power and features to blow even the largest design programs out of the water. Finally, the last program is CADGraphics, which can enable a security company to provide the value-added service of "easy-to-design" graphical display interfaces for their integrated security systems.

Bob Dolph has served in various technical management and advisory positions in the security industry for 25 years. Bob currently is a training and products consultant for the security industry. He lives in Orlando, Fla.

BOB'S TIPS

- Enhance your company's "first impression" with better-designed presentations.
- Use industry symbol standards when designing a system layout.
- To get the most our of a CAD design program, commit to some introductory training.
- Establish a system for prining cabling labels per ANSI/TIA/EIA-606A for cleaner and easier installations.

"Smart' Program Has 50K Symbols

SmartDraw6 (www.smartdraw.com) has been a favorite drawing tool of mine for many years. It is an easy-to-use Windows™ software program for creating technical drawings. The program has a fast learning curve and is very Intuitive.

The program handles many popular graphics formats. The program includes more than 50,000 ready-made symbols and templates cataloged in libraries, including one of security industry symbols. The security industry symbols are similar to current industry standards. You can also easily create your own customized design symbols and save them to an existing library group or create a new group.

The creators of SmartDraw have done a good job of extending the product's help and application examples to its Web site. If you select "help" in many of today's software programs. you will get a nice, but limited help file. However, when you click on help in SmartDraw, you get the option of quickly connecting to an extended resource on the Web.

Don't Be Labeled as a Sloppy Installer

How many of you have heard of ANSI/TIA/EIA-606A? It is a cable labeling standard that I have recently seen appearing in more security system specifications. Basically the standard requires that building communications, networks, and building automation cabling identification labels be mechanically (no more handwriting) printed pre a standardized format.

This standard will have an increasing influence on the security industry as building network systems become more integrated. I am also curious to see how, down the road, this standard will support further enforcement of NEC Articles 725.760.2, etc, when dealing with cable abandonment.

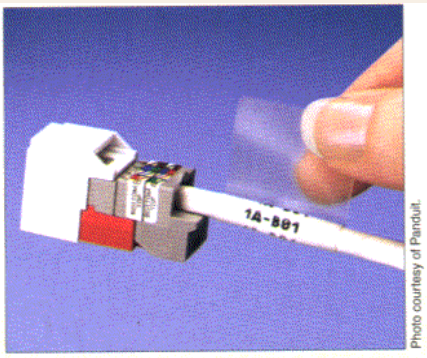

Photo courtesy of Panduit.

For an example of the ANSI/TIA/EIA-606A standard, check out label equipment printing manufacturers such as Panduit. The labels are color-coded, with the security standard being yellow.

For more information on the standard itself , visit the Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA) Web site at www.tiaonline.org.

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Software Offers Multitude of 'Tools'

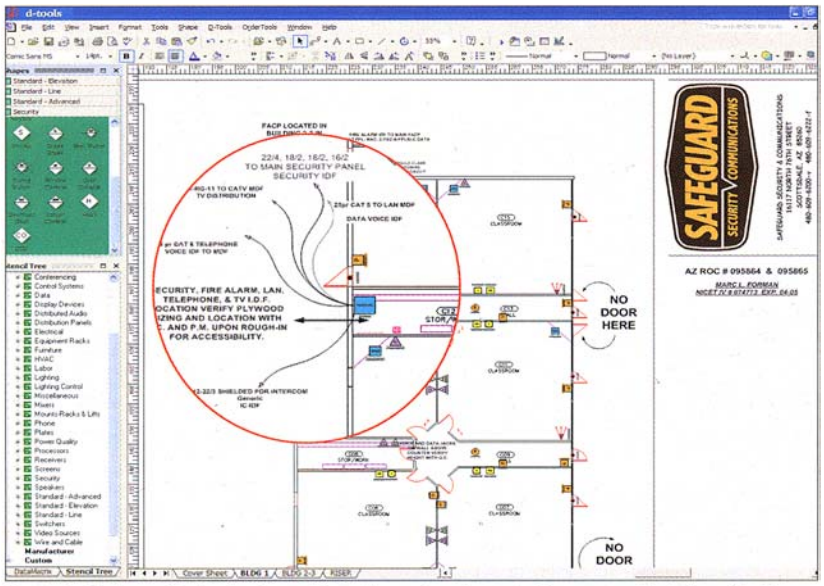
Looking for a design program that will truly take your company to the next level? Then take a look at a program called D-Tools (www.d-tools.com). This is a product marketed by a company that was started in 1998 by Adam

Stone, a fellow systems integrator. "I was looking to save time, increase efficiencies and improve the presentations of my own system integration company," he says.

The original target for D-Tools was the high-end home automation market. It has always been a challenge in any technology installation market, including security, to keep track of a myriad of equipment models and versions; creating presentations and laying out system schematic wiring diagrams and architectural floor plans; elevated rack drawings; estimation lists: wiring lists; print cable labels; installation lists; accounting functionality; etc. Oh yeah, did I mention that this program does more than just draw?

OK, so you are an old-timer in the security industry and you say, "I haven't heard of these people. The company has more than a thousand integrators using its product worldwide and, yes, at the moment you may not have heard of it due to its heavy involvement in the home automation industry. However, D-Tools is currently expanding its proven technology and services into the security industry.

There are opportunities with both security industry integrators and manufacturers with this product. Many



Exploded view of a typical working floor plan layout. Green symbol stencils (*on left side of diagram*) are selected from the Microsoft™ Visio shell and easily dropped onto the drawing.

manufacturers, including some in the security industry, have partnered with D-Tools.

In its partner program, manufacturers provide D-Tools with predetermined product lists, pricing and symbols. This way, in the designing phase, the integrator simply selects his or her favorite component, places it in the drawing and it then comes up in punch lists, accounting, cable label printing, and everywhere else I mentioned previously. If an integrator does not find a manufacturer listed, no problem! D-Tools will take your favorite manufacturers and load them into the D-Tools master database.

I do have a small word of caution with the D-Tools program. Getting started and setting up this software does take some dedication. Initially, you will have to coordinate all of your product and sales databases, accounting and designing through it. However, D-Tools has made the program very easy to work with, and has consultants that, for a reasonable price, will help you get your system loaded and ready to go. I strongly recommend that integrators have their key people go through the initial product training.

Add Graphics to a Monitoring PC

The last software package is CAD Graphics (www.alarmsoftware.com); a design program of a slightly different nature. The program allows a system integrator to provide the value-added service of proprietary graphical alarm monitoring consoles. It takes existing CAD layouts and allows the designer to easily insert alarm symbols into the floor diagram. Both pre- and post-alarm symbols visually show the status of an alarm.

CAD Graphics is designed to interface the monitoring PC with alarm panel communication ports via the PC's serial port and network connectivity. Additionally, TCP/IP hyperlinks can be established for live video on-alarm monitoring. The system interfaces with most alarm panels, providing a versatile high-end integrated system graphical display.

Standardizing CAD Symbols, a Sign of the Times

It has always been a challenge to come up with CAD symbol standards that are simple yet informative. The symbols must be designed so they can easily be interpreted by designers, architects, installers, service personnel. customers and security managers.

Organizations such as the International Association of Professional Security Consultants (IAPSC). in conjunction with the Security Industry Association (SIA), have developed a standard for CAD security symbols that should be acceptable by the majority of security design professionals. The standard has been submitted to the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) Subcommittee F12.10 on Security Systems and Service for incorporation in ASTM's Standard Practice for Security Engineering Symbols F967.

ASTM has current symbol documentation available at www.astm.org. SIA has the AG-01 symbol standard available at www.securitygateway.com. The standards are available on CD for easy importing into the programs mentioned here.