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The importance of security system maintenance and service contracts

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For facility managers, security system maintenance and service contracts, in essence, have become integral components of the security system itself. So what should a facility manager look for in a security system contractor who offers maintenance and service contracts?

First, the security system contractor should be able to provide a full menu of services, allowing the client to choose those most important to the facility. Since it is typically very important that the facility be able to budget for the total annual cost for security operations, the trend in security system maintenance is for the total service plan, which includes total labor and extended warranty, as well as preventive maintenance. This essentially provides a total cost of ownership, which can be planned for capital budget each year.

Software Support as Part of Extended Service Agreements

Over the past several years, manufacturers of top tier security management systems have required that systems be placed under a software support agreement (SSA). As such, this needs to be rolled into the extended services agreement. The penalties for systems not covered by this agreement are that the manufacturer will not support the system, or the technician calling in for assistance. On the up side, systems under the SSA are provided with manufacturers' support assistance (through the security contractor) and the client is offered the latest updates and upgrades for no additional cost.

Total Coverage Plans

So, what should the facility manager expect in a total coverage plan? Aside from the SSA coverage, preventive maintenance should include everything from database housekeeping and backup (both external and offsite); updates to the latest versions of software; testing of all peripherals; and, a comprehensive test of doors, alarms and cameras. Additionally, clients are well served in having the security system provider conduct a trial emergency to ascertain the response of the system, and also the response of personnel charged with the operation of the systems.

Knowledge is the Key to Security System Maintenance

Due to the sophistication of all aspects of security systems, the security system contractor should have security and video systems technicians, as well as software specialists. Top tier systems require a fairly deep understanding of databases and operating systems as well as a myriad of system utilities and diagnostics. As systems have become more dependent on high-level TCP/ip communications, having a telecommunications specialist is no longer a nicety, it's essential to both the installation and function of the system as well as the diagnostics and support of the system into the future.

The additional education of the technician is critical to the successful support of the security system. Our company will only support a system for which all of our senior technicians have attended the manufacturer's training school. The time required to diagnose system failures requires a

comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of the head end systems as well as all of the peripherals used in a total system configuration. These are not systems that an electrician in the field "can just figure out."

A full service security integrator will have staff proficient in communications, both copper and fiber optic, along with the tools and testing equipment necessary to make sure the system isn't just working, but working properly. They should have a software specialist with an understanding of how to design the network and assign proper function, privilege and limitations to the network; a systems software specialist knowledgeable in specific manufacturers' systems; and most importantly, a security systems specialist that knows how to create the proper function and interactions between the management systems and the peripherals, and the manner in which the system will work.

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