



Security in Commercial Applications

Commercial fire safety and security for today's working environment

A Discussion Paper

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About the author:

Jamie Allam initially completed an apprenticeship in engineering obtaining BEng (Hons) before purchasing his first business, Chartwich Limited.

This business was disposed of eight years later for a 14 times initial capital investment before joining Amthal Fire & Security.

Understanding individual capability within the family business, Jamie as the natural Commercial Director has led the team at Amthal Fire & Security on an ambitious five year growth plan, incorporating all aspects of the business which currently stand at sales of £5M following completion of the current three year strategic plan.



Overview

Providing fire safety and security in commercial offices today involves more than just the best offer of products and services, but requires a clear understanding of the building types and usage, including current workplace trends, to protect people, property and assets.

Synopsis

Owners of commercial office buildings today face security issues that concern owners and occupants alike. Whether a property is owner-occupied or tenant-occupied, providing the best fire safety and security to ensure the safety of people and protection of intellectual and physical property is essential.

Employee theft, desperation crime, property crime and information security, especially cyber and fraud offences are major concerns today and now officially cited as rising trends in Police crime statistics.

Commercial office owners must also now be mindful of changes in the workplace, including the natural encouragement of flexible working and rapid adoption of Bring Your Own Devices (BYOD) meaning staff are entering and exiting buildings on a much more fluid basis with personal valuable equipment.

As a result, companies are looking for cost effective, yet smart security technology that can protect people, property and assets. Such technology may range from burglar alarms, fire protection systems, video surveillance, access control systems, and intrusion detection devices.

Technology, in the hands of competent and capable security officers, can reduce property liability, cut material losses, and keep people safe and secure. But knowing where to start to implement or update fire safety and security measures, and then how to involve staff, can be confusing, even simply with the sheer range of traditional and smart solutions available today.

So the question is posed: How can we integrate fire safety and security for the benefit of commercial office premises to ensure the safety of people and protection of intellectual and physical property?

The answers are complex and challenging but the issue is one of real importance for today's workplace environment. By producing this discussion paper, Amthal Fire & Security wishes to stimulate debate and encourage you to contribute your opinion, experience or comment.



People Protection

The people side may appear on the surface to be relatively straightforward to protect employees and occasional visitors.

But in today's complex workplace arrangements, the mixture of part and full time staff, together with individual arrangements of flexible working, before even considering visitors on site, can be difficult to keep track of who is in the building – a necessity both for fire safety and security and must be considered in any security decision.

Asset Protection

The assets range from the protection of physical buildings, to security equipment, through managing data.

Theft by employees is estimated to cost British industry one billion pounds a year and the Association of British Insurers says that its members receive claims totalling £200m a year for computer equipment alone.

In today's commercial office world, there is not only equipment owned by organisations to consider, but over half of British employees use their personal devices for work purposes, ranging from smart phones to tablets and laptops, adding additional pressures to keep assets secure.

Should an incident occur, whilst replacing a laptop or phone may not be bank-breaking to some, the confidential and identity related data contained is far more valuable in the wrong hands, and open up the organisation to a very different level of criticism and legal challenge.

Protecting People and Assets

The key areas of emphasis for securing people and assets – authentication, identity and auditing – haven't changed regardless of the size of the commercial building, its location or the level of security risks that need to be addressed today.

But changes in how and where companies do business with all kinds of flexible deployment models now available for staff, along with rapid technological advances, are driving innovations in the security industries that are beginning to impact on commercial buildings as well.



Smart Security Technology

Regardless of the size of the office building or office park, its location, number of staff or the level of security risks that need to be addressed, there are basic essential components of a smart security system.

As a starting point, these include intrusion detection, access control, and video surveillance. For the more advanced or larger buildings, it can be developed in an all-encompassing flexible building automation system (BAS), where building owners can realise a lower upfront investment for a considerably more powerful security solution. Overall, today's access control and video surveillance systems work together to provide a holistic solution, keeping intruders away from property, limiting access to facilities that house expensive equipment, and remotely monitoring secluded areas to reduce the risk of crime.

This is why more and more offices now rely on CCTV and visual verification as part of their overall security solution. Using an integrated system, security staff at a central monitoring station can view live images from surveillance cameras, control pan-tilt-zoom cameras, or search for video clips stored on networked video recorders (NVRs).

Alternatively, by example, when an alarm is triggered by another part of the BAS, it can command the NVR to begin recording, display live video from a linked camera at the location, map the alarm location, and send a notification to an administrator all at the same moment.

Smart CCTV cameras are also an important security component at office buildings, in communal and parking areas. With an integrated approach, lights and surveillance cameras can be activated to monitor the scene, and if necessary officers can pinpoint when and where to intervene to thwart an attack.

And in most cases, facilities and security teams can make the call based on real time data, deciding whether or not to summon police or take other security measures, or indeed deactivate direct from a mobile phone or tablet. As such, the advantages of efficiency and convenience in smart security for commercial offices are clear. But is smart security always the right way forward? "Using a high-tech solution to solve a low-tech problem can result in wasted money and effort. If you have vandalism problems in a parking lot, adding lights can be a far cheaper and more effective solution than installing cameras."

With so many options available and individual solutions for each security challenge, the fact that the choice is so wide may, in itself, be a problem for time constrained security and facilities managers.



Fire Safety

Alongside the clear objectives to ensuring a secure workplace for staff and visitors on any site, fire safety must also remain a clear responsibility to be assessed at all times, with regular maintenance and testing of operations.

As commercial properties can vary greatly, they carry a variety of different types of fire safety requirements and will need careful design and planning, with a full fire risk assessment taking place before design. And this is especially important as workplaces change in space utilisation with the trend towards accommodating more flexible workspaces.

Fire detectors will need to be spread out across buildings, with several in each main area as required to provide full coverage – so that anywhere a fire starts, the alarm will be able to quickly alert people to the danger.

All fire alarms or sub components of such need to be interlinked together with a central control panel, which should ideally be monitored around the clock. These systems should preferably be addressable, so that the exact location of the fire can be pinpointed.

Detectors will have to be able to detect smoke or heat, whichever is most appropriate for the environment. And it remains the responsibility of the fire safety officer not only to manage the safety of all staff and visitors on site, but also ensure they are fully informed on fire exit strategy and meeting points at all times.



Options and Solutions

So how can a security officer navigate an effective way forward, to provide the necessary fire safety and security measures in a commercial environment to protect people, property and assets?

As discussion points, the following may provide useful indicators:

- Work right from the basics to understand the movement of people within the building to gain a clear understanding of the risk factors to your commercial premises, from both a fire and security perspective.
- This risk assessment must start with the likely level, frequency and severity of threat to the security and safety to premises and staff, quickly followed by the safety and security of other visitors and users of the site
- It is important this risk assessment is informed by credible, relevant statistics and not by headlines, rumours, urban myths or local prejudices
- Remember you may not need sophisticated security solutions in all areas of the building. Differentiate between the functionality you really need and significant cost savings that can be achieved.
- Factor in the quality of the staff (and management) experience by considering the ease with which secure movement can be achieved.
- Back up any findings with a free survey service provided by many leading security installers
- Keep log books up to date to ensure all findings and issued encountered have been resolved.

Summary

There is no doubt that for the commercial sector, security and fire safety is an increasingly complex and challenging issue to protect people, assets and data.

Changes in how and where companies do business, along with rapid technological advances, are driving innovations in the security.

These factors alter the dynamics of security planning and forces designers and specifiers working with private sector developments to consider 'people' and 'assets' on a much deeper level with much greater

focus than just a good choice of access control and other security devices.

A carefully considered security system, integrated in a flexible and scalable building automation system allows multiple systems to be used at once, expand applications of security for least cost, and protect the security system capital investment from becoming obsolete in the near future.

Today maximum fire safety and security is a blending of physical security, policies and procedures as well as smart technology to obtain a safe and secure environment.

Hopefully this paper will start a debate and discussion and raise awareness of the issues and some of the possible solutions. Please add your voice to the debate.

Action Point: This discussion paper has been created to open up the conversation on this important topic. To add your voice to the debate, please visit our LinkedIn company page at: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/amthal-security-ltd/>

We look forward to hearing from you.

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Appendix 1

Independently owned, Amthal Fire & Security was established in 2000. Now fully accredited by SSAIB, UKAS & BAFE; Amthal Fire & Security offers a complete service for the design, installation, maintenance and monitoring of advanced electronic security, incorporating access control, CCTV and intruder solutions, together with fire safety.

On a local and national basis, Amthal Fire & Security customers cross residential, commercial and major public sector markets, including hospitals, schools, national retailers, police, fire and ambulance services, together with private and industrial sector clients, working closely with security and facility management teams to present bespoke fire and security systems to suit building requirements.

Our focus is a very personal, customised service, understanding personal and business needs, advising and designing the most appropriate systems. Installations are completed with minimal disruption while our after sales service team provide the highest quality maintenance, monitoring and 24hr technical support.

We are committed to helping our clients protect their homes and their businesses effectively, using the latest advances in technology and system design while providing the highest quality after sales support and monitoring services.

For more information on Amthal Fire & Security, please visit www.amthal.co.uk