

ATTENTION IN THE

Why Are Independent Integrators Getting Noticed?

By Bill Bozeman

BOARDROOM

It was not too long ago when the access control and video surveillance business was a friendly, cottage industry. The small, independently owned entrepreneurs rode the wave of growth and prosperity uninhibited by conglomerate competitors.

Part of the success and growth experienced by the small independents can be credited to the fact that the big players such as GE, Cisco, Siemens, Stanley and IBM (as well as the mid-sized integrators consisting of cash-rich regional and national burglar alarm RMR machines) were either not in our space, or video surveillance and access control were not emphasized in their business plans.

This is no longer the case as household names now dominate a sizable percentage of the available systems integration market gene pool. These powerful and well-capitalized companies will continue to grow through acquisition, organic growth and leveraging their other business units and strategic partners.

It was interesting and eye opening to witness how quickly global terrorist events pushed our cottage industry to the forefront of large corporate America. As soon as the directors of large corporations realized the video surveillance and access control business could be a growth engine with sustainable and projectable growth patterns, all bets were off and the checkbooks were unlocked.



So where does this leave the independent systems integrator who specializes in video surveillance, access control and the associated peripheral products? Are we doomed to fail? Will our customer base abandon us to deal with a household name? Can we keep up with the rapidly changing technology? Can we afford the new breed of employee who is IT savvy? Can our health insurance and benefit packages be competitive with larger, better-capitalized rivals? I could go on and on, but you get the picture.

The simple response is there is no simple or correct answer. Some independents will certainly perish, while others will flourish. What is separating the winners from the losers is the ability to adapt. We all know change is not easy. Many of the independents are comfortable conducting business as they always have. If your organization falls into this category, you are in trouble, even if your P&L is currently on solid ground.

On the positive side, I deal with independents on a daily basis, of who are doing what they need to do to ensure their companies will not only survive but thrive as well. Success is all about leadership and vision. Successful independents learned early in the game that leadership and vision are not just for large corporations. Every company needs a strategy along with strong leaders who understand what is going on in our rapidly changing industry and who possess the intestinal fortitude to make the tough decisions.

These decisions could mean partnering with a competitor, allocating the time and the budget to advance the company technically, becoming more fluent with business acumen skills, and most importantly, reaching out to professionals, associations, consultants and peers to ensure their strategy is backed up by more than an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" attitude. Help and knowledge is available to assist you in directing your strategy. You just need to reach out and grab it. Making the time to gather the knowledge you need to successfully guide your company's strategy should not be an option for any clear thinking leader.

Will the independents survive in this tough environment? Of course we will and this is what makes America such a great place.

About the Author:

Bill Bozeman is president and CEO of PSA Security Network, the world's largest electronic security cooperative. Bozeman has 29 years experience in the security systems integration business. In 2005, he was inducted into the Security Integration Hall of Fame and was recognized as one of the 25 Most Influential Security Executives in 2006. Visit www.psasecurity.com for more information on the PSA Security Network.

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