

The Right Security Vendor

Criteria for choosing your best business partner

By Robert J. Walker

The self-storage industry is one-of-a-kind. The time, energy and money that goes into the design and planning of a new state-of-the-art facility or the renovation of an existing building are critical to success. One of the biggest selling features for any self-storage project is security, yet it is often forgotten or put off until the very end.

Integrated security is a must in this day and age. Therefore, choosing the right security vendor is essential. If your system is not properly planned and installed, your facility will not be open for business shy of a pencil, paper and cash box. Features such as access control, unit alarms and site graphics ultimately dictate a facility's day-to-day functions.

Past Projects

Rule No. 1 in choosing the right vendor is to visit a facility the supplier has already completed and ask the management about the company's follow-up service and response time. This is a key indicator of the level of confidence and involvement the vendor will have during the progression of your project. The vendor's experience is crucial in the self-storage business because there are so many details that can be missed. It's imperative to have the supplier involved early in the game.

Understanding Infrastructure

The right vendor will take the bull by the horns when it comes to infrastructure. Out of the gate, this should be the focus of some of the company's first questions to you.

For facilities with gate access and multiple buildings, the security supplier should make sure all of the underground conduit and stubs into the buildings are in place. It should also choose an area in the facility where all security-control equipment will be installed, and lay out any additional underground structures.

Next the vendor should ask about the interior infrastructure of each building, starting with the office. The office is vital because it links the front-desk personnel to the integrated system. Think of it as "the driver's seat." You have to plan

for many components such as the phone, computer network, intrusion alarm, fire alarm, CCTV, access control, intercoms, music system, individual unit alarms and site graphics.

Equipment

Next, consider the equipment each vendor offers. Technology being what it is today, comparing components will mostly be like comparing apples to apples. What separates the amateurs from the professionals is when a vendor ties all of the technology together and understands its functionality in all scenarios.

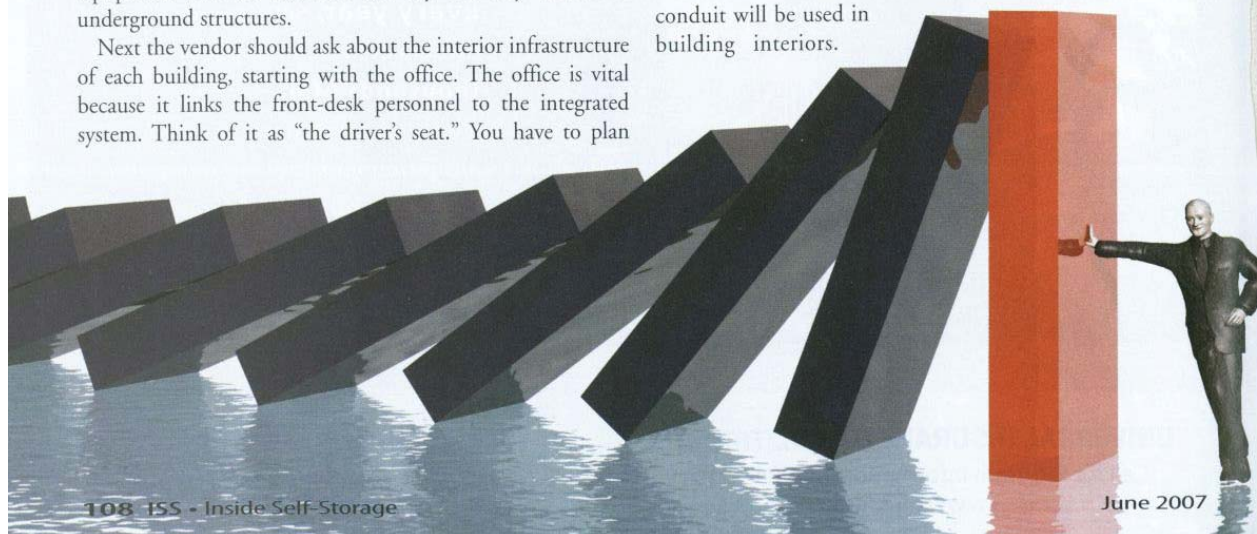
For example, the right vendor should be able to handle tasks such as scheduling access for time and keypad zones; programming unit information for proper elevator control; and arming the alarm partitions for buildings and office while allowing for early entry or late exit without fault. These are just a few of the things a good security vendor will know how to manage.

If you've found the right company, reps will meet with you to cover these types of items, because these are the areas in which unwanted change orders pop up without warning. By addressing issues in detail, the job will run much smoother. Besides, the vendor should prefer a long business relationship to the added sales that result from poor planning.

The Importance of Installation

Another key factor in selecting the right vendor is the quality of installation. With the amount of equipment that gets installed, ADA, wire management and electrical requirements are just a few things that should be second nature to the installing company, along with proper wiring schematics and daily as-built modifications.

Decide in advance if conduit will be used in building interiors.





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This will be determined by the level of protection you want to provide for the security infrastructure as well as the aesthetics of wire management. It's important to use conduit for any of the wall-mounted equipment, because it allows for wiring to reach each device and keeps the wire protected in low, reachable areas.

My senior security consultant, Michael Hallett, told me something his grandfather, a 40-year veteran in the security industry, used to say: "Good work isn't cheap, and cheap work isn't good." That really sums it up. Installation is one area in which you do not want to cut back. Skimping here can dramatically affect the final outcome of your system.

When It Comes Down to It

The right vendor may or may not be higher in labor costs in relation to its competitors, but you have to focus on the basics. Remember the prior jobs each vendor showed you and the issues you covered. Also, don't be afraid to ask vendors—either during the pre-selection process or at a pre-construction

meeting—about their methods for installing your system so you have some expectation of their quality.

The final considerations in choosing the right vendor are items such as system testing prior to turnover, system training of management and staff, and ongoing service and maintenance. It's the service after the sale that truly counts. When the right vendor understands this, the whole process becomes clear and comfortable to the facility owner or developer. **ISS**

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