FOUR TIPS FOR DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE CAMPUS SECURITY

Changing technology, an evolving security industry and increasing threats are all factors today's educational facilities must take into account when considering security

By: Mary Wilbur

The sad reality of today's campuses, whether K-12 schools or college campuses, is that they can no longer be areas anyone is welcome to enter; there must be steps taken to prevent someone who would enter the campus with intentions to harm students, teachers, and staff. For years many organizations have been reactionary, thinking some of the horrific acts of violence happen elsewhere but could not happen here. However, recent events, especially the Parkland shooting, have caused many to realize they must be proactive.

People who studied education most likely have no formal training in the security field, yet now they are expected to make expert decisions about campus security. So how can those in this field make the best choices with regard to campus security? Here are four things to consider when developing campus security.

Prioritize Integration

Integration has been one of the biggest buzzwords in the security industry for the past few years. People understand the need for different technologies to communicate effectively and reliably, and to provide law enforcement, firefighters, and school administrators with seamless communication with security systems so they can effectively do their jobs.

"Many of the recent tragedies have caught us, from the campus security side, off guard," Paul Fisher, Director of Key Accounts, at Salient Systems said. "Just because I have this access control system, this camera system, and a gunshot detection solution, security professionals still need to confirm these products are going to work seamlessly together."

Unfortunately, Fisher says, as 9/11 taught us, seamless interoperability isn't always the case.

"While many security consultants might say certain technologies should or must integrate, they don't necessarily go through the process of step-by-step implementation and review," Fisher said. "You need to ask yourself, 'If this is happening, what should happen next?'"

The main goal of the consulting world is to fit a video system or a security system into the budget of the school district or bond, and unfortunately, things might get left out as schools don't always have enough money to outfit their campuses with a fully effective security solution.

Fortunately, attitudes in this area seem to be shifting as campus security professionals address real threats towards their campus and begin to be proactive about implementing a solution that truly integrates and interoperates with the various layers of available technology, as well as with campus readiness programs and local law enforcement.

Schools can focus on physical hardening aspects of security, such as a man trap area in a vestibule or bulletproof doors. Another technology campuses are finding useful is gunshot detection. While this technology is not new, it has certainly become far more effective than it was in its earlier iterations, and when integrated properly with video surveillance systems and mobile map technology, it can be an incredibly useful tool for law enforcement entering a potentially deadly situation and for those who need the earliest possible warning.

"If you talk to students and really listen to the stories that come out of the shootings," Fisher said. "So many times the kids say, 'We thought it was something else; we didn't realize it was a gun.' Until they realize the gunfire is right next to them, they don't know what is happening."

As soon as the gunshot is detected, that's an early warning for the teachers and students to get out of the hallways and into a classroom or an area where they can lock the door.

Another related technology that must integrate with an overall security system is automatic lockdown. As soon as the school realizes there is the potential for an event, it must have the ability to lock down as many doors as possible while still providing the ability to see inside the school, so the responding officers have a better idea the threat and giving staff and law enforcement awareness into the situation.

Facilitate Situational Awareness

Fisher says most schools use their video surveillance systems primarily for investigation purposes after the fact, but to truly save lives, schools must be able to offer useful live video feeds to law enforcement. This requires integration with gunshot detection systems that can pinpoint the spot where a shot was fired and highlight the live feed from nearby cameras. A simple interface must give an officer, who may not be trained in such a system, the ability to know where the camera is located and the direction it is pointed so that he or she has the situational awareness necessary to find and neutralize the threat as quickly and safely as possible.

This situational awareness is closely tied in with a campus security system's integration with other technologies. To help organizations better capitalize on this technology, Salient's platform is offering the ability to implement maps into a mobile device, Fisher says.

"So now with a handheld device, mobile phone or a tablet, approaching law enforcement, if given that access, can look at a map that will show the direction the camera is pointed and its physical location on the map of the facility," Fisher said. "If the video surveillance system is tied to the gunshot detection system, it would trigger the camera to change colors indicating this is the general direction the shot came from. With a camera that is physically located in the area, the instant video will show exactly what's happening in the camera view area."

Get the Experts' Input

For educational institutions, finances are probably the biggest barrier to getting the most effective system. Those making the decisions must not only spend the allotted money wisely, but they must spend it on proven technology. Schools can't afford to spend it on a new technology that makes huge promises but fails to deliver.

One way Fisher says educational organizations can ensure they are good financial fiduciaries is to cultivate partnerships with local, state, and even federal law enforcement agencies. "A security consultant addressing a school board doesn't have as much weight as your local FBI saying it," Fisher said.

Local businesses often partner with law enforcement and the FBI, who will come in and do an evaluation of the facility.

"They come into ports, airports, critical infrastructure on a daily basis and provide a threat assessment. It would be valuable for school districts to go to local or state level and even a federal level law enforcement agency and ask for an evaluation of their campus," Fisher said. "Those evaluations would provide a high level of assurances for a school board when they propose a bond request."

Cultivate Meaningful Partnerships

Institutions must partner with the right companies to truly get the most out of their security solutions and integrations.

"The industry started with proprietary technologies in everything they did," Fisher said. "And then it moved to an open architecture approach. Security industry manufacturers are now moving back to a proprietary format, meaning that companies have decided they want to be the jack-of-all-trades and the master of none. They offer access control, cameras, VMS, analytics—they try to wrap it all up and say they can do it all."

Fisher says it is the companies that continue in an open architecture approach that has the ability to really hone in on the best-of-breed technologies and provide the flexibility to adopt and deploy the best available components of a total solution.

"We are committed to helping you design the best video security solution for your needs," Fisher said. "And we will integrate with companies that offer products that meet those needs."

Integration between systems can be one of the most important features for day-to-day users of the security system. If multiple security technologies are in place, integration of those technologies should be a goal for most organizations' security programs in order to maximize benefits from each system.

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