

# DETERRENCE OR ARRESTS?

## Checking the value of consumer alarms

By Keith Jentoft

Every month, more products pour into security magazines and catalogs. We see a torrent of innovation and evolution continually adding features and reducing costs along the way.

We need to step back from the tsunami of progress and ask, “So what?” What is the purpose of all this effort? Is there some technical nirvana we can bask in when we finally reach 100 megapixels, or ultimate peace when mesh networks consume our geography? Or is it all simply a pointless game of live fast and die? It is time to step back and consider the true goal.

I am talking specifically about intrusion alarm systems. Amid this continuing flood of technology now delivering wireless sensors, cell communications, radio backups and integrated video, we need to take a breath and ask ourselves, “What is an intrusion alarm for, and where is the value to the consumer?”

We must understand both the function and goal of an intrusion alarm before we can evaluate the value of new technology for our customers. The function of an intrusion alarm is to detect intruders and notify authorities, but the value of the alarm to the consumer depends upon the response of police. Ultimately, is the goal

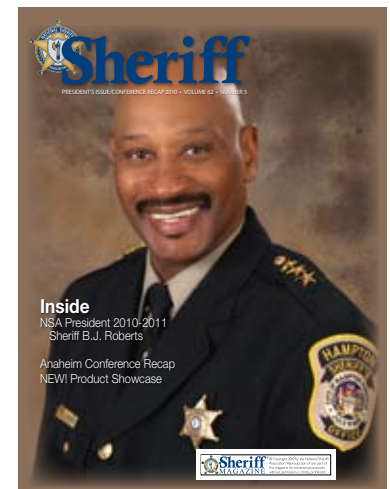


**Sheriff** MAGAZINE © Copyright 2010 by the National Sheriffs Association. Reproduction of any part of this magazine for commercial purposes without permission is strictly prohibited.

## National Sheriffs Association Endorses Videofied – Cordless Outdoor Video Alarm System

### Excerpt from the due diligence report prepared by the endorsement committee:

“All Central Station Alarm Service providers, Alarm System Integrators, Customers, and Sheriffs Offices that were surveyed commented favorably regarding the overall level of service and support they receive from RSI Video Technologies Inc. or their sales representatives. All of the survey respondents rated the Videofied Alarm System as one of the more reliable Alarm Systems that they use. Survey respondents indicated that law enforcement officials favorably receive the Videofied Alarm System because alarm conditions are supported by video clips that allow Central Station operators to verify the intrusion before reporting the alarm condition to law enforcement authorities. They indicated that the video technology associated with the system allow Central Station operators to provide responding officers with information on the number of intruders, their descriptions, and other information, increasing the probability of apprehension and arrest. Many of the respondents provided case histories reflecting that property crimes were reduced or eliminated at customer locations that installed these systems.”



of intrusion alarms simply deterrence, or is it actual arrests?

## CATCHING THE BAD GUYS

While the basic detect/notify function remains unchanged, the goal of intrusion alarms has evolved over

time with changes in technology. Initially, intrusion alarms were designed to catch criminals. The early systems used hardwired McCullough circuits with a maximum range of 30 miles. All monitoring was local, and alarm companies worked closely with their

local police force. These expensive systems were only installed in places of greatest risk, such as banks and telegraph offices. Detection consisted of breaking a simple circuit, usually with a switch at a door or window. These silent systems had no siren to scare off

the intruders because the goal was a red-handed arrest.

The consumer electronics revolution began with the invention of the transistor, which gave rise to a new generation of affordable detectors. These new sensors detected motion and even the sound of glass breaking. But at the same time, communications evolved and automated switches replaced humans as telephones became standard equipment in homes and offices. Intrusion alarms also embraced new lower-cost communications—first using a tape dialer and then, as phone networks evolved, the digital dialer in 1972.

This quantum leap in communications meant that the notify component of intrusion alarms could scale, and it became affordable to a mass market. Detection and notification exploded into mainstream America, pushing millions of systems into small businesses and the homes of residential consumers.

## THE MOVE TO DETERRENCE

While the basic function of detection/notification did not change, the goal of intrusion alarms began to evolve from arrests to deterrence.

False alarms and imperfect detectors led to high false alarm rates, which became a growing issue for police. The industry tried to improve detection technology and the accuracy of an alert by calling property owners before notifying police of an alarm.

The goal of intrusion alarms went from delivering arrests to deterrence. Sirens were added to system designs, and salespeople began selling deterrence as the key feature. This made a security company's yard sign the most valuable part of a security system.

## BATTLE FOR RESPONSE

The threat of an arrest is the source of deterrence. With the proliferation of systems, law enforcement's perception of intrusion alarms began a shift from partner to adversary as they dedicated more resources to responding to alarm dispatches. At first, the industry soft-pedaled the issue.

In the early 1990s, the International Association of Chiefs of Police proposed non-response as a nationwide option to what they believed to be the growing burden of alarm response. This transition away from response was a threat the industry could not ignore, and it began taking action at several

**More Arrests - Lower Costs**

Camera

The MotionViewer

Upgrade your existing system with cordless/wireless MotionViewers that send a 10 second video clip of what caused the alarm over the cell network to the central station for instant verification and priority response.

**videofied**  
Made by RSI VIDEO TECHNOLOGIES

To see videos of actual arrests visit: [www.apprehensions.videofied.com](http://www.apprehensions.videofied.com) or call: 877-206-5800

levels, including the Electronic Security Association, to pursue evolutions in detection and notification to reduce alarm dispatches sufficient to maintain police response.

The ESA transitioned this effort to the coordinated alarm reduction effort that ultimately culminated in the creation of Security Industry Alarm Coalition in 2003 with dedicated full-time staff to drive evolution in products and processes and reduce alarm dispatches. Improvements in detection targeted both the detectors and the hardware and operation of security panels, including creating the CP-01 standard.

SIAC drove improvements in notification that also were important including ECV, placing two phone calls before notifying police, which delivered huge reductions in alarm dispatches. These efforts by the industry were overwhelmingly successful in maintaining police response, with only a few exceptions.

#### DETERRENCE TO ARRESTS

The value of deterrence stagnated as consumers and law enforcement came to grips with the reality that law enforcement resources simply cannot provide an immediate response to every alarm. Response times grew to a point that they were threatening the value of deterrence. The political discussions between industry and law enforcement on alarm response has shifted from an all or nothing battle of non-response to creating tiers of response, giving different alarms different priorities.

Security companies are embracing this more liberal stance.

Some states, like Colorado, have implemented policies with a tiered response. In most of the state, the response to an alarm is broadcast and file, which means that the police dispatcher announces the alarm over the radio and any police in the area have the option to respond if they choose to do so.

If, however, the alarm is verified with video or an actual eyewitness, an officer is assigned to respond with the goal of arresting the intruder. Similar prioritization of alarms is already in place across the country in dispatch centers run by police and sheriffs.

The obvious goal, from law enforcement's perspective, is a return to arrests. This approach gives highest priority to alarms that will most likely result in an arrest—because crimes in progress receive a higher priority response. Now

a new generation of technology offers video alarms.

These new alarm systems still follow the pattern of detect/notify but go a step beyond and deliver a short video clip confirming what was detected. This video confirmation moves the re-

sponses to a higher priority, creating new value for the security industry and delivering greater life safety to the consumer. Prioritizing alarm response is a natural evolution toward more arrests and greater deterrence—and you can't have one without the other.

**Keith Jentoft** is the president of RSI Video Technologies.



## Upgrade to Response-Ability



The MotionViewer™

**Law Enforcement Gives Priority Response** to enhanced video alarms, shouldn't you? Transform your existing system into an enhanced video alarm and get cell backup for free.



Made by RSI VIDEO TECHNOLOGIES

To see videos of actual arrests visit: [www.apprehensions.videofied.com](http://www.apprehensions.videofied.com) or call: 877-206-5800