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Selecting the Right Security Consultant for Your Project

Independence, appropriate experience and good references are just some of the signs that the consultant you've hired is the right fit for your university, hospital or district.

By John Horvath and Frank Pisciotta

The University of Massachusetts, Amherst (UMass) recently selected an external consultant to perform a comprehensive review of its residence hall security program and make recommendations for improvements to ensure a safe campus community. The report addressed residence hall layout, nuisance alarm activation and remediation, among other recommendations. In choosing to contract an external consultant, UMass took into account a number of issues, and some of the

key considerations that factored into their decision can serve as a good guide for any organization for whom safety and security in a residential setting is of utmost concern. Referencing the UMass decision-making process, let's take a look at important considerations when choosing the right security consultant for you.

Security consultants generally work for non-security experts to provide supplemental knowledge, experience and services. However, it is also very common for such consultants to be retained by seasoned security professionals for a variety of reasons.

How often a security consultant is used in settings such as higher education, healthcare, municipalities or corporations will vary based on the individual institution's needs and circumstances. The consulting services consumer needs to first identify the type of consultant for the organization's needs, verify his or her independence, solicit a qualified consultant at an affordable fee and manage that consultant throughout the engagement.

Of note, one of the most significant challenges in this process is verifying a consultant's qualifications. There have been so many entrants into the market since the tragic events of 9/11 who profess to know security but might not actually be qualified.

The first step in hiring a reliable consultant is to define the requirements of the job. Does it involve the analysis of risk, implementation of security systems, regulatory compliance, management consulting, training or defense of an inadequate security claim? Only after the requirements of the job are defined can you select the right type of consultant to complete the work.

Security consultants generally fall into one of three categories: management, technical and forensic. For UMass Amherst, for example, technical security knowledge and experience were important components of the consultant selection process. Some

would argue that a security consultant should work in more than one of these areas. A management or forensic consultant who fails to keep up with security technology cannot serve his or her client in the best manner possible.

**KEY FACTORS TO CONSIDER
IN CHOOSING A CONSULTANT**

You want your consultant to be independent and not affiliated with a product or service. If your consultant is not independent, you should know about his or her relationship with a product or service line and understand that it may result in a conflict of interest.

Typically, an independent professional security consultant is going to be a member of ASIS International or the International Association of Professional Security Consultants. These are the

**HOW MUCH INDUSTRY
SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE IS ENOUGH?**

What does the consultant need to know about the industry in which you operate? There are two schools of thought, and each has some merit. One school says for the consultant to be effective he/she must know your business; the other states that critical diagnostic processes can effectively be applied uniformly across multiple organizational types.

Those who believe the security consultant needs to have significant depth in a vertical market may assert the number of consulting engagements the consultant has performed in the relevant area of service/expertise is critical. For example, analyzing threats to water treatment plants is different from evaluating dangers at universities or hospitals. While there may be some common issues, there are enough significant differences that make specialized experience and knowledge crucial.

The counter position might hold that there are key fundamental processes (e.g. facility characterization, threat assessment, risk analysis) that can be applied to different markets with effective results for the client. In fact, sometimes there is merit to introducing a consultant from outside the vertical market as he or she can introduce security solutions that are used in other vertical markets not previously known or deployed in yours. Additionally, some services such as risk assessment necessitate a partnership between the client and the consultant for effective results. For example, a client would be in the best position to identify their critical assets and the consequences to the loss of those assets. A consultant with industry experience will still be reliant upon the client to furnish critical data to inform the analysis.

For institutions of higher education, a well-rounded security consultant who brings education, training and experience through a broad spectrum is desirable. In the case of UMass Amherst, the preference was a consulting team approach that provided a broad knowledge base with specialty skills available when needed.

DEFINE THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

The key to any successful security consulting engagement is a proper scoping of the work to be performed. Do you know what problem you are trying to solve? Do you know what work methodology makes the most sense to address your needs? Have you had a significant security incident and now want someone to come in and provide an overall analysis? Some advance planning and evaluation may be in order to determine specifically what to ask for from your prospective security consultants. Don't be afraid to



This security desk is well positioned at a newer building at UMass Amherst. During busy times, the desk is staffed with security personnel to register guests. Access to the interior doors to the housing area is also controlled, providing a second level of security.

top two logical affiliations. While lack of membership in either of these organizations does not equate to a lack of qualifications, participation indicates that the prospective consultant at least professes to observe the code of ethics and to meet the minimum standards for affiliation with the groups.

There are also several industry certifications that serve as benchmarks for the professional security consultant, including the Certified Protection Professional (CPP), Physical Security Professional (PSP) and Certified Security Consultant (CSC) among others.

Additionally, the consultant must be able to demonstrate prior experience and knowledge as well as provide references. While safeguarding confidentiality is an essential part of a consultant's business, most clients when asked will agree to serve as a reference. Be wary of the consultant who claims that all of his or her clients are confidential and refuses to provide references.

Residence Life Security Challenges	Potential Solutions
Finding creative ways to effectively educate students to recognize and report other students of concern (for violent behavior or suicide) and crime prevention in general (mandatory floor meetings do not work anymore)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Documented security educational program for students, faculty and staff ■ Multimedia, repetitive messaging ■ One-on-one interaction between resident assistants and students to develop a closer personal relationship
Establishing a security program that is predicated on prevention versus police response after an incident	Conducting a security assessment to identify the baseline threats associated with a college or university residence life program so that preventive measures can be implemented to reduce the risk
Assuring that appropriate protective and emergency planning services are provided by departments outside of residence life control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establishing a design-basis threat for the residence halls and apartments ■ Regular meetings and liaison with campus public safety and emergency response resources to communicate needs of residence life
Providing protection to students who likely value convenience and openness versus security and control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Creative education in terms of the students' role in the security program and the potential consequences if security fails ■ Sound physical and technical security planning and design to overcome a motivated student population that will attempt to circumvent security measures
Monitoring perimeter doors for propped or forced-open conditions	Installation of door alarms, utilization of electronic access control, 24x7 monitoring and response to actual or potential breaches of security
Effectively deploying video surveillance under challenging requirements (such as influence of outside lighting, threat of vandalism, analog or IP, sharing of images/who gets to view live and recorded video, and standardization)	Retain a qualified independent security design consultant to identify requirements and match the technology to the needs; advisor should not be someone who sells the technology being specified
Determining the appropriate lobby layouts to effectively manage visitors and prevent unauthorized access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Limit non-residence life activities (e.g. retail, classrooms) inside residence halls, which expand authorization of non-residents inside the secure area of the building ■ Ensuring a second layer of access control from the lobby for proper processing of visitors ■ Consider guest limits ■ Staffing lobbies ■ Consider turnstiles for high risk towers with high traffic volumes
Triggers that could elevate student stress and increase the risk of dangerous behavior (e.g. academic failure, financial difficulties, bullying and personal conflicts)	Implement a response program to increase security measures in the event of an elevated threat condition where normal security measures may be insufficient for a short period of time
Properly integrating residence life personnel with campus behavioral threat assessment teams	Effectively train residence life staff on the potential indicators of a student of concern and the specific intake process for the behavioral threat assessment program
Training resident assistants in first response to emergencies (before outside responders arrive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure a residence hall- or apartment-specific emergency action plan is prepared and residence life staff are properly trained ■ Conduct regular drills to maintain readiness, critique at the conclusion and update the plans as necessary based on lessons learned

engage some security consultants in discussion during the scope definition phase. You will learn a lot and may even get support in forming a scope of work that you can use to solicit formal proposals. In short, your scope needs to clearly define what you want and when you want it. Whatever you decide, be sure you and the consultant agree.

Once you have a good scope defined for your project, you may wish to consider documenting the most important parameters of the project in a formal request for proposal (RFP). The RFP is a good tactic for leveling the playing field when selecting a security consultant as it ensures that the proposals you receive will be against equivalent work scope criteria.

When evaluating proposal responses, it is important to realize purchasing professional services on a low-cost basis is a recipe for disaster. There is an elevated risk of getting a substandard quality consultant or having a work scope that will result in requests for change orders throughout the course of the project. Fee management is an important part of retaining a consultant, especially since budget, billing and fee processes are unique to each individual campus.

Additionally, when the decision is made to retain a security consultant in response to a specific need, it is important not to rush the selection process. Doing so only to pacify critics that second-guess the timeliness of your actions is likely not the best decision. Timely, informed and well-thought out decision-making should be your guide. In the safety and security profession, being fiscally responsible includes being safety-conscious and must entail looking at the service being provided and how that service will fulfill the desired outcome. Open communication with organizational leadership is very important in demonstrating the current needs and how they impact today, tomorrow and beyond.

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

It is essential to discuss project fees and expenses with consultants in advance. As a consumer, you are entitled to know how the consultant's work is billed. Is there an hourly, daily or week-

ly rate? The more details you iron out in advance, the fewer surprises there will be later. If you have a budget and need to work within it, a good consultant can provide you with options for getting some benefit for the available funds by using different methodologies.

An ethical and experienced consultant should be able and willing to point out the types of problems that might arise and expand the scope of the project and its budget. Ideally, some contingency should be built into every agreement, particularly when uncertainties are anticipated at the outset of the project. You should also require that the consultant keep you informed of additional costs as they arise so there are no surprises when the bill comes.

GOT MULTIPLE BIDS? CONSIDER SHORT LISTING

If after reviewing proposals from multiple consultants, you have no clear-cut choice, consider creating a short list of consultants from the perceived highest ranking consultants. Start with a check of references to ensure the individual is both competent and trustworthy. For major projects, it is not uncommon to invite the consultant to your office to introduce him/her to the project. This interview allows you to evaluate the consultant more closely and allows the consultant to assess the scope of your problem.

DON'T GO IT ALONE

UMass Amherst found the use of a selection committee for the process of hiring a security consultant to be very important and effective. The institution identified dedicated stakeholders on campus who were passionate about keeping their community safe. These individuals were in positions to facilitate implementation of the recommendations upon conclusion of the security review. They were also committed to sustaining enhanced security conditions. The selection committee then operated as a team, challenging each other and the process along the way, ensuring they were making the most informed decision. The selection committee members had a vested interest in the areas of security they focused on and the safety of UMass Amherst's students, which is always of paramount importance.

Institutions of higher education, hospitals and other settings with part-time residents are in a unique position in that they must provide a tangibly safe atmosphere for key constituents (including visitors and staff) while also creating a sense of home and community for their students or patients. In the case of a university, if the campus appears either unsafe at one extreme or too cold and militaristic in the way it provides safety on the other, the school risks alienating not only current students, but prospects and alumni.

Campus safety professionals walk a fine line that can sometimes make a fresh, independent look at process, policy and procedure very beneficial. **CS**

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Is Your Consultant Qualified for the Job?
There are a number of methods for identifying a qualified consultant. In the United States, one of the primary sources of independent security consultants is the International Association of Professional Security Consultants (iapsc.org). The IAPSC also operates a free referral service for consumers of consulting services.
Another excellent source of qualified consultants is colleagues in your industry who have used a consultant and are pleased with the relationship. Additionally, you may find resources through industry trade groups.
A consultant's publications and professional papers also can provide insight into their knowledge of your issues or industry. Consultants who write for professional publications have to keep abreast of the myriad changes in technology, techniques and trends.