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At the corporate headquarters of The Principal Financial Group

By P.J. CANNON

A man arrives at his wife's place of employment and a heated argument ensues. They leave the main building with voices raised and head for one of the gated parking ramps. A concerned witness calls the Security Operations Center to alert them of a situation that appears to be getting out of hand. The wife uses her employee proximity card to enter a parking area, and the husband follows her.

The use of the card allows security to access information about the employee on the database and to pinpoint her exact location. A remote camera is activated to follow them, and a security officer is dispatched to the scene to defuse a potentially violent situation.



These events occurred at The Principal Financial Group in Des Moines, Iowa, and were handled smoothly because of years of planning. Similar tense situations occur daily in office complexes across the country.

They are handled with varying degrees of success, depending on a number of factors: * ability to pinpoint the location of an incident and monitor it via a remote camera, * competent security officers and control room technicians, and * commitment of resources to a safe work environment.

Principal is a group of companies offering insurance and financial products and services to businesses, groups and individuals. They have 250 offices worldwide and employ more than 17,000 people, 6,800 of them at the Des Moines corporate headquarters. The complex, with about two million square feet of office space, is comprised of five buildings connected by tunnels and skywalks. The new system has also been connected to remote facilities in Waterloo, Iowa, Grand Island, Neb., and Mason City, Iowa.

Principal's security system came under scrutiny during the planning of the fifth office building. They had to decide between expanding their existing system or going with a completely new system. The security system team, headed by Bob Dove, director, facilities management, and Sandy Cowie, CPP, manager of security/safety, facilities management, made a thorough assessment of Principal's needs.

The new building forced us to decide whether to install outdated technology or look at a more total security solution for the entire corporate complex, says Cowie. We spent a lot of time getting input from security and safety staff, facilities management, information services, administration, engineering, human resources and other team members. Our conclusion was that the existing technology was outdated, and the perimeter control was weak.

Dove says they considered upgrading and expanding the existing system, but support for it had been deteriorating since the company was bought out, and parts were becoming increasingly difficult to get.

Realizing the best long-term investment was a more technologically advanced system, they studied several security management systems and vendors, evaluating the following areas:

- * system capabilities, including user-friendliness, flexibility, interface potential with other security products, response time and reliability;
- * operating system, communication options, network capabilities and future expandability;
- * photo imaging capabilities, including ease-of-use and integration with access control and other in-house systems;
- * quality and cost of training;
- * service contract, warranty, ease of maintenance, long-term support, response time and quality of technicians;
- * understanding of project; and
- * bid price versus value. Cost, Compatibility Key Decisions

Following the evaluation, Principal's security project team selected the Infinity system by Andover Controls. One consideration was cost, and Andover offered a cost-effective solution that also provided the best interface with our existing operating systems, says Dove.

I don't think there is one system out there that is a total solution, adds Cowie. I also don't think that technology answers all your security problems. I think a

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Ad Council

successful security program is a synergistic combination of different components: operations, staffing, policies and procedures, and technology.

The new system is powerful, but user-friendly. It has an existing in-house human resources (HR) system, state-of-the-art photo imaging and badging, multiple remote sites and the flexibility to integrate CCTV. The five buildings were connected by a fiber-optics network. The new system controls 115 doors with HID card readers, and monitors 135 others in the complex and at several remote sites over a wide area network (WAN). The Infinity system also interfaces to Principal's 75-camera Vicon CCTV system using an Andover Controls Plain English software driver.

A local company, Control Installations of Iowa, installed the system. Control Installations has been integral to the security project, says Cowie. One of the criteria we looked at when selecting a system was support of the local supplier, their reputation and our relationship with them. They have helped coordinate transition issues and made the implementation successful. As a result, there was minimal downtime and inconvenience to employees and customers.

The biggest challenge, according to Chris Earlywine, project manager with Control Installations, was maintaining continuous security during the installation and transition to the new system. We did this by using two proximity card systems simultaneously, so there was no lapse in security, says Earlywine - a real challenge due to the large number of employees.

Wayne Hansen, president of Control Installations, adds, Principal had tough technical requirements, but they also had personnel that understood those requirements completely. They recognized the technical value, and they did not let price alone dictate their decision.

Security Hub Serves Many Functions A new Operations Center serves as the hub for all security controls and houses two central SX 8000 workstations, the file server and badging center. Part of our security project was to centralize in the Operations Center our monitoring of cameras, access control, the fire-life-safety system, some of the building automation system, radio dispatch and intercoms, says Cowie. It was also important to staff the center with personnel who had backgrounds in emergency communications.

The Operations Center serves as the emergency communications center for the company and monitors police, fire scanners and weather conditions for the area. We have our own radio system where we lease the towers, but the security staff have their own channel, says Dove. The Operations Center keeps track of the building automation system and alerts the engineering personnel when there is an alarm from that system. In a complex this size, it is necessary for the engineering staff to have contact with the Operations Center, says Dove. An addressable fire alarm system is being installed and should be complete by April.

A lot of thought went into the design of the center. Cowie and Dove asked for input from consultants, from other companies who had similar operations, from their engineering firm and from their own staff. They even looked at ergonomic issues. The center is designed to have two people run it, even though typically there is only one. We wanted the ability to control everything within a certain radius and avoid neck strain in looking at the monitors, says Cowie. The ease of maintenance was an issue for us, so we designed it so that the equipment can be accessed from behind without interrupting the core of our Operations Center.

The Operations Center and HR are housed in the Corporate Two building, which is the hub of the complex. The close proximity follows the trend toward integration of HR and security databases. The Infinity system has its own HR software that can communicate with the security databases, so employee data is not duplicated. Integration of HR and security databases provides a definite cost savings in man-hours, says Hansen. A big advantage of the integration is evident when an employee is terminated. When HR enters the termination information in their database, it can be programmed to automatically download to security's database and cancel the employee's access card.


I think we are out of the age when security operated on its own. It should be integrated with other corporate areas in regard to their information systems to be more efficient, says Cowie. One example is our photos. We receive a lot of requests for corporate use of the photos we take for security ID badges. We provide photos of new employees for our internal publications, and I think there are more opportunities out there that we just need to be aware of to further facilitate efficiencies.

Taking full advantage of technology Frequently, companies that purchase technologically advanced systems do not use them to their fullest potential. However, Principal is looking to take full advantage of the Infinity system and has plans to increase use of the database for systems management. We would like to include in our database product information on our security equipment maintenance so we can get a better handle on what our budgetary requirements are going to be to maintain that equipment, says Cowie. We are also looking for opportunities to automate other processes and integrate and interface with other applications.

Advice What have they learned from the process and what advice would they

give other companies when it is time to expand their security system? Cowie and Dove agree that cost is a factor, but you have to look at cost versus overall value. Proper preliminary needs-analysis is crucial, and technology, even though it's important, is not going to meet all of your needs, says Cowie. One important consideration is corporate culture.

Principal's corporate culture is conservative. However, they aggressively support security and safety in the workplace. Most of our security is behind the scenes and unobtrusive to our customers and employees, although, by its very nature, security causes some inconvenience. We don't come down like the long arm of the law, and we don't have gates and bars and those types of applications here. We want our customers to feel comfortable in coming to us and have an ease in visiting our facilities, but we also want comfort in knowing we are properly protecting their information and their assets, says Cowie.

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