Do You Really Need a Security Consultant?
We think so! Here are 7 good reasons why.

Do you really need a security consultant, especially for a simple design of and entrance control system like optical turnstiles or portals into your building’s lobbies and entrances? After all, as a security director, security or loss prevention manager, you are very qualified to perform your job. That’s what you are paid for, right? We’d like to offer our view on the importance of independent professional security design and consulting.

In our daily business we have worked on many security projects especially in the area of pedestrian and vehicle entrance control. We have helped design and provide tens of thousands of turnstiles, portals and gates in thousands of buildings and campuses. Time and time again we have seen the benefits of professional security design and likewise have seen the shortcomings on projects built without a professional security engineer consultant.

Today’s increasingly complex world offers many examples where situations call for an outside expert. Look at medical care, as an example. Modern medicine has advanced so rapidly that outside experts are often required to properly care for a patient. And chances are good that your company uses an outside accounting firm to review its financial statements, even though they may have accountants as employees. Large corporate giants and even governments call upon private firms for specialized services all the time, in many specialized areas to increase efficiency and productivity. Oftentimes consultants are “hired” for work at our firms where the nature of the projects or specific functions are seasonal or periodic.

So consultants in general are a critical and important part of our everyday world. The same goes for security engineering/design and security project management.
Strong security and facility management professionals recognize that certain situations call for an outside expert. You know our own expertise and our strengths, you are quite confident in our work. But you also know when to bring in outside assistance, especially considering the many benefits both financially and otherwise.

We’ve listed seven most impactful reasons that a security consultant is critical for your security and/or entrance control project:

**# 1 – INDEPENDENCE - SECURITY CONSULTANTS DON’T SELL EQUIPMENT OR INTEGRATION**

It seems like EVERYONE calls themselves a consultant these days. Isn’t it amazing how so called “consultants” always come up with solutions that involve you buying their products? A true consultant, like most security consultants we have ever dealt with, is one who does not profit in any way from their recommendations to you or your company. This independence allows them to offer you the best advice, tactics and equipment without there being a financial incentive behind the recommendation.

**# 2 – TACTICAL PLANNING - SECURITY STRATEGY**

A good security consultant will ensure that you spend time building a firm foundation based on strategy before suggesting any tactics aimed at improving security. He/she will start with something called a risk analysis that identifies vulnerabilities and helps set the stage for what is needed. A sound strategy sets guidelines and provides structure so that security objectives may be identified and aligned with business goals. Good consultants have experience with situations similar to yours. They are familiar with best practices and solutions that have worked in other applications and bring that knowledge to you. They will have the benefit of knowledge and experience from similar projects in related industries or geographies.

**# 3 – SPECIALIZED SKILLS**

Some projects require expertise with security disciplines or integration that you simply don’t have in-house. A security consultant can fill these skill gaps so that you may successfully achieve your overall security and business objectives. Security consultants are trained and typically certified in skill areas required for special projects such as security planning, engineering & design of a security and entrance control system, RFP management, contracting, and project management.

**# 4 – RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)**

Security consultants really pay for themselves in terms of the money that is saved through the processes and value that they bring to the table. For one, many times security projects issued by security managers often get bid out without proper specifications and qualification criteria, thereby inviting low quality bids or bids with major shortfalls in terms of components required for an effective system. When this happens the cost of change
orders and unexpected expenses can be quite high. A low bid turns into the highest cost in the end. Additionally, your security consultant will have an objective eye and a non-biased view on the various competing proposals that are delivered in response to an RFP. His/her involvement and independent analysis can help take the potential effect of relationships out of your decision. They can also “tell-it-like-it-is” without having to worry about company politics or making corporate enemies.

#5 - FOCUS

One of the big benefits to working with a security consultant is that they keep focused and accountable to completing the tasks at hand. A good consultant will help keep the project on schedule, and limit the possibility of unintended “project creep”, and the resulting “budget creep”. You will get unbiased expert opinion of your situation. Sometimes we as security professionals can get too close to a situation to see it clearly. A security consultant can bring a fresh perspective for your consideration. And they’ll keep the project moving forward to generate results.

#6 - TRAINING & THE LATEST TECHNOLOGIES

With rapid advancement in security technologies, and the increasing amount of integrations between systems, you may not be up-to-speed with the latest in technology. Strong security consultants stay current with technology. Many have access to insider information from security equipment manufacturers and other users that you simply don’t have. Most professional security design engineers have many years of training and have certifications from organizations like ASIS, BICSI, AIA, and the like. Additionally, they stay abreast of all improvements and enhancements in the vendor product lines, and they vet those products before adding them into their arsenal of recommended solutions. By employing a security consultant you will have access to all of that training and knowledge.

#7 – MORE EFFECTIVE USE OF YOUR TIME OR RESOURCES

As a security professional, manager or director you have many demands on your time and resources. We don’t know of even one security buyer who has extra time on his/her hands to manage risk analysis, security design, product selection, RFP, and implementation for a sophisticated and effective security or entrance control project. These projects take thousands of man-hours. It’s highly unlikely that you have the time or staff to successfully complete a project of such scope, and definitely NOT in a timely manner. Security consultants can work full-time on projects without the daily distractions faced by the security manager.

The right consultant at the right time can save you money. Due to their expertise they can often complete projects faster than in-house teams. Consultants are less likely to make errors. And since their recommendations are not dependent upon product sales commissions, office politics, or vendor biases, you’ll gain unbiased, expert advice.
WHAT TO DO NEXT?

There are many excellent security design engineer consultants to choose from. At Automatic Systems, we have worked with hundreds of excellent security practitioners in design and management of security entrance control projects. You will want to make direct contact with one more to discuss your particular needs and develop a plan for working together. Some independent security consultants are members of the International Association of Professional Security Consultants (IAPSC). Many others can be located by searching for terms such as “security technology consulting”, or “physical security design consultant” on the web. Another potential resource is the Security Specifiers website.

We welcome your comments about this article. Please share your experiences with security consulting & the security design /procurement process in the area below.

(Many security industry professionals and consultants provided input for this article. In fact we received so much helpful info that a longer and more detailed description of the security consulting role will be written as a follow up paper. Some of those who helped: Charles LeBlanc of BLW Security Group, Rene Rieder of ARUP, Ray Coulombe of Security Specifiers, Doug Fitzgerald of FTG, Patrick Markham of Guidepost Solutions, David Duda of Newcomb & Boyd.)

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