Monitronics Masters Alarm Management

One of the nation’s largest dealer-driven security firms is proving when it comes to alarm monitoring scale and quality need not be mutually exclusive. Monitronics’ tireless commitment to managing false alarms and reducing unnecessary dispatches has enabled it to become the first monitored services specialist to capture the Police Dispatch Quality (PDQ) Award. By Scott Goldfine

Alarm monitoring is usually considered a mundane, routine part of the job for security firms, but Monitronics’ tireless commitment to managing false alarms and reducing unnecessary dispatches has enabled it to become the first monitored services specialist to capture the Police Dispatch Quality (PDQ) Award. Monitronics further distinguished itself by becoming the first monitoring firm to receive the industry’s highest honor for its efforts in reducing false alarms and false alarm reduction efforts.

Founded in 2005 by the Security Industry Alarm Coalition (SIAC), False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA) and Security Sales & Integration, the PDQ award recognizes monitoring firms that demonstrate a strong commitment to reducing false alarms and false alarm reduction efforts. The PDQ program’s mission is to raise industry-wide awareness, promote partnering with responding agencies for public safety, educate alarm companies to be proactive and provide workable models. Applicants participate at no charge and are evaluated by three judges in a rigorous and thorough process that utilizes 14 areas (see box).

While still impressive but falling just short of the mark in this area in the past, this year Monitronics’ extraordinary efforts and results — painstakingly detailed in a 381-page submission — could not be denied. With a focus on the Charlotte-Mecklenberg (N.C.) jurisdiction where it matches an alarm dispatch rate of 184, Monitronics’ high and consistent grades narrowly edged out finalists Aba срокs Alarm and Engineered Protection Systems (see sidebar).

“Monitronics demonstrated a huge commitment to educate dealers and customers on the real cost of false dispatches,” says SIAC Director Ron Walter, a PDQ judge. “The sheer quantity of materials far surpasses anything we’ve seen in previous years. It was this commitment that was the thing that caught the judges off guard. This is the type of effort that the FARA and SIAC would like to see from all applicants.”

Another judge, FARA Past President Jerry Miller, adds: “Each year, Monitronics impresses the quality of service to their customers, including advertising, installation, training, monitoring and false alarm reduction efforts.”

Nationwide in 2013, Monitronics handled millions of high-priority alarms, with more than 95% related to burglary or police public arrest. Less than 5% resulted in a request for police dispatch. As a monitored services-focused firm, Monitronics’ accomplishments are all the more impressive considering its effort must be coordinated with its new management efforts and does not directly employ officers. One of the most important PDQ requirements is demonstrating a strong relationship with law enforcement. An excerpt from a letter of endorsement from Charlotte-Mecklenberg Police Alarm Services Coordinator David Wilson speaks volumes: “We are served by 2,000 alarm companies. Unfortunately, we don’t have communication with many of them until there is a problem. On the other hand, the Monitronics Customer Relationship Management team calls to verify they are doing exactly what they should to reduce false alarms...”
Monitronics continues to work with our agency with a goal of minimizing false alarms for the benefit of the community.

As the nation’s second-largest residential security provider, Monitronics’ CSAA Five Diamond Certified Alarm Response Center (ARC) serves more than 1 million homes and businesses overall. In addition to its nationally-recognized FFDA Award, among the company’s other achievements are being a lifetime Frost & Sullivan Alarm Monitoring Company of the Year and three-time recipient of the Consumers’ Choice Award for excellence in business and customer service among Dallas-Fort Worth headquartered alarm companies.

Clearly, there is something very special going on at Monitronics. In a Q&A, Vice President of Monitoring Operations, Doug Anderson, a 15-year industry veteran, explains how the company dependably delivers 24/7 on-demand service to dealers, alarm customers and law enforcement alike.

What are some of Monitronics’ overall keys to its business success?

DARIN ANDERSON: Monitronics prides itself on its customer service and satisfaction. We offer customers 24/7 security in our No. 1 priority, a customer’s experience and satisfaction with us are just as important. We’ve won numerous awards and accolades over the years, have become five-time CSAA certified, and maintain a UL-listing, but that’s not the whole picture.

We strive to be a valuable partner of security to both our dealers and customers. We not only actively train and support dealers as well as customer care representatives so they can provide superior service to our customers, but also provide ongoing support to our customers as a way to improve their overall customer experience with us. While we develop our dealer networks and provide the support they need, we also work with local agencies to support the efforts of law enforcement and emergency personnel to make visiting our customers easier.

Security truly is our priority. We operate to not only monitor our customers’ security, treating every alarm as if it is a real event, but actively work to preserve our customers’ peace of mind.

Who are the people responsible for developing, implementing and maintaining the program? How was the mission handled organizationally?

ANDERSON: Our approach to false alarm reduction is companywide. Efforts for acknowledgment of how well we educate both customers and employees all the way to the accuracy of customer data that we maintain and later provide to the authorities. The program really starts on day one, where we cultivate the dealership and installing technicians to lay the groundwork for success with reducing false alarms. Because they are the first contact made with the customer, this is our first opportunity to help customers better understand how to use their system. We also use it as a time to express the importance of properly managing their information. For emergency
dispatch operators to use in the event of an alarm. Once an alarm is installed and customers are trained on its use, the focus is geared more toward keeping customers informed and taking the appropriate steps to prevent false dispatches whenever possible. This includes everything from ARC (Alarm Response Center) enforcing Enhanced Call Verification (ECV) protocols to their integrity validating customer and agency information, and emergency dispatch operators to use during emergency situations.

We consider the level of education that we provide our employees, a critical part of the picture. Our internal training department is dedicated to the front line agents who actually interact with customers, as well as a department specializing in dealer education and support. Focusing on all parts involved has truly allowed this program to thrive.

**THANKS TO AMHERST FEWER FALSE CALLS ROAM BUFFALO**

Founded by GDT in 1987, and his wife, Mary Ann, in 1994, Amherst Alarm is a full-service installation monitoring provider serving Western New York. With more than 50 employees, Amherst operates its own computerized UL monitoring center and its $250,000 dispatch center for the city of Buffalo and surrounding areas.

Highlights of Amherst’s diligent alarm management practices include a customer focus and an enhanced call verification (ECV) monitoring the process followed when an alarm occurs. Sales staff, during their initial installation, cover important aspects about procedures as well as client duties, posting false alarm reduction on our website, contributing to local newspapers, and instructing police on the proper use of the alarm control center, particularly using the defuse function management software to track and follow up on false alarms, and making sure that installers are minimum NTS certified.

A weekly management meeting is held in which the top 50 accounts, with dispatchers, are reviewed with the executive, central station, installation, service department, and customer service management, says Creem. “The report is comprised of who is a problem and discuss on any account that needs further action is made and acted upon.”

Creem is active in local (Western New York Electronic Security Association) and national (Electronic Security Association) and security organizations for a variety of leadership and board positions. He has spoken at the FAMA Annua, Training Symposium, CPQ and ECV processes.

Prospects, clients, and other interested parties can take a look at the Amherst Alarm facility via the firm’s YouTube channel at you tube.com/user/AmherstAlarmCFAuto. Congratulations to Amherst Alarm on being a 2014 PDQ Award Finalist.

Amherst Alarm’s process like the IQ program and ECV makes it a leader in Western New York for cutting false dispatches.