

On the BRINK'S of NO FALSE ALARMS



Brink's Home Security has been recognized for its company-wide commitment to reducing false alarms by capturing the 2006 Police Dispatch Quality (PDQ) Award. Find out how the national alarm installation and monitoring firm posted a false alarm dispatch rate of just .17 in Montgomery County (Md.).

By Scott Goldfine

Editor-in-Chief

Security Sales & Integration

scott.goldfine@securitysales.com

AT A GLANCE

- Security Industry Alarm Coalition, False Alarm Reduction Association and *Security Sales & Integration* established the Police Dispatch Quality Award in 2005 to recognize alarm companies for outstanding false alarm reduction programs
- Irving, Texas-headquartered Brink's Home Security named winner of the second annual PDQ Award after notching a false alarm dispatch rate of .17 in Montgomery County (Md.)
- Brink's approach focuses on training; counseling offenders; Enhanced Call Verification; SIA CP-01 compliant control panels; and working hand-in-hand with law enforcement
- Aurora, Ill.-based, Alarm Detection Systems (ADS) was named runner-up in the PDQ competition

“We recognized the business necessity to reduce false alarms. We're a company that has always worked to control false alarms. [Plus] it's good corporate citizenship to partner with law enforcement,” says Carole Vanyo, senior vice president of customer operations for Brink's Home Security. That mentality, program execution and outstanding reduction in false alarm dispatches has resulted in the company winning the second annual Police Dispatch Quality (PDQ) Award.

The Irving, Texas-headquartered national alarm systems and services provider was notified of the PDQ honor earlier this year when it was jointly announced by the program's organizers: the Security Industry Alarm Coalition (SIAC), False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA) and *Security Sales & Integration*.

Brink's was subsequently recognized for its accomplishment with the official award presentation at SSI's SAMMY Awards March 27 in Las Vegas, and later during a ceremony conducted by FARA and local law enforcement leaders in Montgomery County, Md., the region where the company achieved an astounding false dispatch rate of .17.

It was eight years ago when Brink's — a name synonymous with security since starting out as a delivery operation in 1859 and that today serves in excess of a million (primarily residential) customers throughout North America — became more serious than ever about false alarms.

“What happened was an increasing focus and intensity of our efforts,” continues Vanyo. “In looking at the drivers of customer disconnects, we identified key indicators, one of which was dispatch satisfaction and activity. This, coupled with the desire to improve agency and industry relationships, intensified our efforts.”



Security Industry Alarm Coalition Executive Director Stan Martin (left) and False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA) President Norma Beaubien (second from right) present the 2006 Police Dispatch Quality Award (PDQ) to Brink's Home Security Senior Vice President of Customer Operations Carole Vanyo as Security Sales & Integration Publisher John Lacasale looks on.

Photo courtesy Brink's Home Security

Photo courtesy Reed Exhibitions

Established in 2005 (Pittsburgh's Vector Security was the initial recipient), the PDQ program aims to stem the false alarm problem by recognizing those installing and monitoring companies that follow established industry practices and partner with law enforcement to achieve the highest quality in police dispatch requests. The goal is to raise industry-wide awareness, motivate alarm companies to be proactive and provide models that work for others to follow.

With that in mind, Brink's reveals how it created, implemented and continues to maintain its award-winning program. In addition, the alarm coordinator serving the jurisdiction where Brink's notched such great success lends perspective from the law enforcement side. Finally, in a sidebar, PDQ runner-up Alarm Detection

Systems (ADS) of Aurora, Ill., discusses its approach and formation of a False Alarm Reduction Team.

Intensive Approach to False Alarms Carries Over to Entry

When it comes to submission-based award programs, the saying "You have to be in it to win it" rings true. However, just entering, no matter how worthy the applicant, provides no guarantee of recognition. As most "A" students learn in school, you have to give the teacher, or in this case the judges, what they are looking for.

That means studying the judging criteria and providing as much detailed supporting material as possible to make your case.

This strategy was not lost on Brink's, which clearly did its homework and submitted a voluminous, three-ring binder packed with all the relevant materials needed to address each and every aspect of its comprehensive false alarm reduction regimen. The company tabbed 11 separate sections that included examples and explanations of all its practices.

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When considered along with Brink's proven and impressive results, its well-organized presentation served as a reflection of just how serious — company-wide — it is about false alarm reduction. Ultimately, this complete package won over the three-judge PDQ Award panel.

"We're involved in alarm reduction efforts on a lot of fronts, and felt the overall company resources dedicated to alarm reduction made entering a worthwhile pursuit," explains Vanyo. "We're very pleased to win. It reflects well on our employees and the initiatives we've undertaken. It's been a long, sustained effort and the award is a nice culmination that tells our people 'good job.'"

Team Effort, Dedicated Personnel Lend Power to Program

In addition to Vanyo, the primary people responsible for developing, implementing and fine tuning the firm's false alarm program include

Chris Cage, former vice president and general counsel who recently moved over to Brink's parent company; Kathleen Schraufnagel, who works on permitting, government and ordinance issues; and Jay Autry and Darin Anderson on the monitoring and permitting side of the business.

Vanyo also credits the company's product development group, which tests new panels and ensures specific features get built in, as well as technical operations for assuring systems are installed properly and that customers know how to use them.

"It's an ongoing effort," she adds. "We don't consider the mission to be finished. Issues are identified during the course of doing business and we address them and move on. We participate in solutions to problems that arise industry-wide, always looking to get involved early and be part of the team that crafts how to proceed."

To that end, one of the unique approaches Brink's has taken to reduce

false alarms is the commitment of two positions to work on these issues with local governments. Resources and time are dedicated nationally and to local jurisdictions like Montgomery County. Staff members in these roles also participate in organizations like the National Burglar and Fire Alarm Association (NBFAA), SIAC and FARA.

Full Complement of Proven Practices Are Deployed

In its submission materials, Brink's went to painstaking lengths to illustrate how it meets or exceeds the demanding requirements of the PDQ Award, which is graded according to the qualifications set forth in 14 different categories.

These areas include various levels of customer training, communication and false alarm counseling/discipline, technicians being NTS Level I or II (or equivalent) certified, installing SIA CP-01 compliant control panels, employing Enhanced Call Verification (ECV),

Brink's Makes Life Easier for Law Enforcement

One of the most important components of running a successful, respected alarm installation/services business is cultivating a friendly, respectful, cooperative and collaborative relationship with local law enforcement. This is also one of the primary factors considered for the Police Dispatch Quality (PDQ) Award, which this year was presented to Brink's Home Security.

The company's winning entry included an affidavit by Norma Beaubien, director of the Montgomery County (Md.) Department of Police False Alarm Reduction Section, verifying Brink's outstanding false alarm dispatch rate of .17. It further stated that Brink's falls within the top 1 percent of lowest dispatch rates for all companies with more than 50 customers within the county. Following is what Beaubien, who is also president of the False Alarm Reduction Association (FARA), had to say about Brink's.

What makes Brink's worthy of winning the PDQ Award?

Beaubien: They have demonstrated a company-wide commitment to reducing false dispatches through utilization of best practices such as installing CP-01 compliant equipment, performing outreach to alarm abusers, extensive training and required certification programs for installers, false alarm prevention tips in monthly bills and the voluntary implementation of Enhanced Call Verification.

Is Brink's an exemplary role model for other alarm companies?

Beaubien: Should a problem arise, Brink's staff are always ready, willing and able to assist us in resolving the issues. They have developed exemplary working relationships with public safety agencies throughout the Washington-Metropolitan area. Other national alarm companies could certainly learn from the successes of Brink's. They have made false alarm prevention an integral part of their overall business plan in a manner that can easily be embraced by other companies.

How does Brink's foster strong relations with police?

Beaubien: Brink's complies with our local laws, which means public safety does not have to devote resources to trying to get that compliance, as we do with other alarm companies. With the false alarm prevention program they have in place, it also means public safety has to devote far fewer hours to working with their problem customers, which gives us more time to devote to true problem alarm user accounts. They help jurisdictions get local ordinances passed and work extensively with industry and public safety associations, which gives them exposure to a far greater number of colleagues and public safety professionals.



Assistant Chief Drew Tracy (right) congratulates Brink's Technical Manager John Weatherholtz for the company's PDQ Award at its Frederick, Md., branch.

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demonstrating good relations with law enforcement and proof of a low dispatch rate.

Training, Educating Customers, Staff Is of Paramount Importance

Whether it's in person, via the mail or online, Brink's channels a lot of energy to building long-lasting relationships with its customers by keeping them trained and well informed about all matters pertaining to their alarm systems. A recent decision to make ECV mandatory for all new residential accounts (commercial had been so since 1993) illustrates the effectiveness of these policies.

"We put a lot of effort into explaining ECV and permit issues to our existing customers through mail-outs and my-brinks.com. As much as possible, we worked to be proactive on those efforts by getting materials to them early so accounts could be updated," Vanyo offers. "We also used bill stuffers to communicate. Our technicians and salespersons are fully trained in presenting this information to new customers."

Brink's has one of the most comprehensive technical training programs in the industry. In addition to being required to become National Training School Level I or II certified, technicians endure a rigorous 12-week in-house training course that includes classroom work, time in the field and



Photo courtesy Brink's Home Security

From sales personnel to installers to customer service representatives to central station operators and beyond, Brink's stresses clear communication with customers. This all begins with the initial sales presentation.

online studies. Technicians who work in the commercial fire sector are further required to obtain NICET certifications.

"For our sales folks and technicians, it's an ongoing training effort, keeping them educated so they can teach customers about their systems," says Vanyo. "Regarding ECV, we have not had any is-



Photo courtesy Brink's Home Security

Brink's Home Security, which has more than 1 million accounts across North America, began offering Enhanced Call Verification to all new customers all the way back in 1989.

sues getting our monitoring personnel up to speed on the practice. One big key success story was standardizing installations and training, which simplified the process."

It would be impossible for Brink's to cultivate trained, informed and consequently happy and loyal customers without a corporate culture predicated on facilitating these qualities from the top to the bottom of the organization. The key is making sure employees know they are valued and instilling them with a sense of pride in their work.

"We have reporting practices that help employees," adds Vanyo. "For example, we provide a monthly report to the field that lets them know what our current ECV base is. Similarly, through our Customer Activity Performance Scorecard, we give feedback to Field Operations on dispatch rates per customer in the first 30 days after installation. We also rank technicians for recognition purposes and to gauge training needs."

Company's Technical Aptitude Prepares It for CP-01 Standard

In the area of control panel standards, Brink's had actually already been programming its systems to conform with many of the precautionary false alarm edicts and features specified in the CP-01 standard (introduced in 2003) for more than 10 years. In fact, 99 percent of its total panels installed since 1983 include false alarm reduction features, and almost all the work the company installs today is CP-01 compliant.

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"Brink's is committed to industry standards. What's good for the industry is good for the company. Using best practices and industry-approved equipment is good for any company, as well as their customers and the local community," states Vanyo. "We adopted equipment with about 90 percent of the

CP-01 standard built in back in 1993. Essentially, we were in compliance long before it became a standard."

Unique Law Enforcement Alliance Produces Amazing Results

The aforementioned actions have helped Brink's foster a solid reputation

ADS Takes 'Team' Approach to Dispatch Discrimination

Alarm Detection Systems (ADS) President and CEO Robert Bonifas has long been a recognized industry champion of false alarm reduction. The Aurora, Ill.-based company — which primarily serves Illinois and Wisconsin — has invested in at least one full-time false alarm reduction

to problem accounts, installing CP-01 compliant control panels, keeping customers informed via mail/Web and working closely with local law enforcement are key to its false dispatch reduction. One of its most recent and significant tactics has been instituting Enhanced Call Verification (ECV).

"As new customers become part of the ADS family, they are asked for names to call before dispatch," says Central Station Manager Rick Raper. "As far as getting information from established customers, we sent a mailing to all of our customers, giving them full information on our anticipated change in process and asking them to supply us



Photo courtesy Alarm Detection Systems

ADS personnel show off their certification patches representing the nation's first central station with all dispatchers 5-Diamond Level II certified.

professional for more than 12 years, and currently has several employees assisting on its False Alarm Reduction Team.

Despite handling an account base that has grown by about two-thirds since 1992, ADS has managed to produce an average of 91.1 percent of potential dispatch signals not being dispatched due to the deployment of proven verification procedures. These efforts and results have led to the firm being named the 2006 Police Dispatch Quality (PDQ) Award runner-up.

"We feel very strongly that being responsible for the dispatches made starts with the alarm company," says Bonifas. "We want to make every effort, and have the police departments that we work with want to continue to work in a cooperative way, and that takes some additional effort on our part. We also believed that finding somewhat permanent solutions to problem customers would reduce our costs in the long run and history has proven us right."

ADS' practices of assisting in the permitting process, thorough user training, prompt follow-up after false alarms, special attention

with secondary phone numbers. Problem accounts became less problematic. Customers who have given us feedback are impressed with the change and appreciate our efforts to help cut down on false dispatches."

Bonifas encourages other companies, big and small, to adopt these proven reduction



Photo courtesy Alarm Detection Systems

In the event of a false alarm, ADS personnel often visit the customer in an effort to avoid future issues.

techniques for the betterment of the entire industry. "All alarm companies play a role in the reduction of false alarms," he says. "It is a situation that needs to be addressed by the entire industry. In fact, it is the only ethical thing to do."

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with law enforcement. In Montgomery County, alarm companies are required to take an active role in the alarm system permitting process. Hence, the company has created a dedicated permitting department and works closely with the county's False Alarm Reduction Unit.

In a testimonial letter, Norma Beaubien, director of the Montgomery County Department of Police's False Alarm Reduction Section, wrote: "Thank you for your due diligence in reducing false alarms and for being a good corporate partner in our alarm management goals." She also called Brink's false dispatch rate, which places it within the top 1 percent of lowest dispatch rates for all companies with more than 50 customers within the county, "remarkable."

"Communication and a willingness to listen to the concerns of the other side are two critical components in successful relationships with law enforcement," advises Vanyo. "The more we understand each other, the more we can cre-



Photo courtesy Brink's Home Security

In addition to being required to become NTS Level I and II certified, Brink's technicians go through a rigorous 12-week in-house training course that includes classroom work, time in the field and online studies.

ate an environment that is mutually beneficial. It really comes down to meeting with law enforcement and local elected officials before opinions are hardened. Ultimately, we are all con-

cerned about the customer/citizen and what is best for them.”

Despite outcries for verified response in many municipalities around the country, Vanyo contends if the industry does its part to implement all available measures that reduce false alarms the vast majority of police departments will continue to respond to alarms as a normal part of their duties.

“There will be some communities that stop responding, but those are most likely to be cities that have severe officer shortages or an unwillingness to explore negotiated and consensus solutions,” she says. “Nonresponse comes with its own set of costs for the community.”

Cutting False Alarms Proves Rewarding on Many Levels

Clearly, Brink’s has invested a lot of time, effort and money in its false alarm reduction strategies. Apparently, management is more than satisfied with the return on investment (ROI), but what prompted the firm to commit so thoroughly to its plan?

“There were three main drivers: Retaining customers over the long haul, containing costs and improving our customers’ experience,” answers Vanyo. “The ROI was readily apparent as we began to see the growing strength in these three areas. Since 1999, our customer base has grown 75 percent while the number of calls associated with alarm dispatch handling are actually below 1999 levels.”

Winning the PDQ Award now becomes icing on the cake for Brink’s as an additional reward for hard work and being driven to do the right thing. In addition to the validation, Vanyo and her associates remain magnanimous about what it means for the industry as a whole.

“One of the best ways to inspire other companies is to show results, and we believe the PDQ Award is a good example of that,” she says. “Clearly, winning the award sends a signal to others that we embrace practices that can help others. Successful alarm reduction is good business. It’s a selling point to customers, and something customers should look for when they choose an alarm company.” ■