

Security Sales & Integration

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HOLY SCHMIDT!

‘EAP’ Program Helps
Firm Win PDQ Award

GRASPING GRAVITY
OF 3G SUNSET

6 Experts Weigh In on
Challenges, Solutions



A regional systems provider implements a three-pronged plan to thwart false alarms. Find out how its EAP (education & training; attention & review; protocol & standards) scheme helped win 2021's Police Dispatch Quality Award.

By Scott Goldfine

Shown (l-r) are Schmidt Security Pro President/CEO Brian Schmidt, COO Ken Zahn, Director of Sales & Marketing Christen Dingess and Security Systems Group Manager Troy Bright.



SCHMIDT Polices Its Security

“You can't understand someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes” is a variation on a well-worn, universal concept that is particularly apropos where the 2021 Police Dispatch Quality Award (PDQ) is concerned. There's a kind of poetic justice in that the latest representative for a program dedicated to promoting relationship building between the security alarm industry and law enforcement is a company founded by a former police detective. Launched by Bill Schmidt in 1976, Schmidt Security Pro is a full-service security and fire solutions provider based in Mansfield, Ohio.

During 2020-2021, the firm worked closely with its local city safety service director and alarm administrator as they revised the Mans-

field Alarm Ordinance. Schmidt Security Pro representatives directed officials toward the Model Ordinance, best practices and fine structure provided by the Security Industry Alarm Coalition (SIAC) as a reference point during the drafts. The updated ordinance specifies more accountability for alarm owners and providers alike — requiring companies to supply user training and documentation, and an escalated fine schedule for chronic false alarm offenders.

“We met with them in person and exchanged emails providing suggestions and feedback during the revision process, providing perspective from both an alarm installer and end-user standpoint,” says President/CEO Brian Schmidt, the company's second-generation leader. “It's a great honor to be the recipient of the 2021 PDQ

award. I'm excited that our team is being recognized for the work they have done toward reducing false dispatches — and helping to positively impact our customers and community.”

Established by SIAC and *Security Sales & Integration* and endorsed by the Partnership for Priority Verified Alarm Response (PPVAR) and Installation Quality (IQ) program, the PDQ Award annually honors a security firm that best demonstrates a proactive, cooperative and successful effort in false alarm reduction strategies. Now in its 16th year, the program's mission is to raise industrywide awareness, promote partnering with responding agencies for public safety, motivate alarm companies to take action and provide workable models.

“Schmidt Security Pro reflects the commitment to excellence we look for when reviewing PDQ Award applications,” says SIAC Executive Director Stan Martin, a member of the *SSI* Industry Hall of Fame. “We congratulate Brian Schmidt and his team for their exceptional work addressing alarm dispatch reductions.”

Joining in to reveal more details about their outstanding operation are Schmidt Security Pro COO Ken Zahn, Director of Sales & Marketing Christen Dingess and Security Systems Group Manager Troy Bright. In addition, PDQ runner-up B Safe Security is separately spotlighted.

What were the drivers in Schmidt Security Pro mounting a comprehensive false alarm reduction program? What makes Schmidt proactive rather than reactive in this area?

Brian Schmidt: Schmidt Security Pro recognizes as a professional security installer it is our responsibility to take the lead in false alarm reduction. One of the primary drivers was a local municipality that was in the process of revising their alarm ordinance. We felt it was important to be part of the initiative to provide ideas and solutions focused on false alarm reduction. To provide the best insight, we reached out to industry organizations such as SIAC as well as other municipalities, alarm administrators and security dealers to assemble ideas on best practices.

Our company mission is “To positively impact our customers, co-workers and community.” Putting a stronger focus on reducing false dispatches and strengthening relations with law enforcement is in alignment with our company mission.

Who are the primary people responsible for developing, implementing, fine tuning and maintaining the program? How was the mission accomplished organizationally?

Schmidt: Schmidt Security Pro's EAP Program was developed as a result in our strategic team meetings as an initiative the company could take to reduce false alarms and improve the overall customer experience. This was an objective for 2020 that was shared with all team members. Different parts of the program were owned by the following teams, which also reveal the meaning of EAP acronym.

Education and training are the responsibilities of the technicians and our dedicated trainer to ensure that the customers are comfortable with their systems and know how to operate with competence. *Attention* and review falls on the

Schmidt Security Pro's 35 associates serve a 15-county region in Central Ohio. The company provides integrated services to homeowners, businesses, schools, hospitals, banks, government agencies, manufacturing facilities and more.





14 PDQ BEST PRACTICES

1. Advertising, sales literature provide realistic expectation of alarm response
2. Salespeople explain permitting requirements, fees and fines
3. Use of Enhanced Call Confirmation (ECC, formerly ECV)
4. Contact customers after every false alarm
5. Track worst false alarm offenders and take action if needed
6. Instruct customer on verification process and keep call lists updated
7. Ongoing communications with customers
8. Installers have minimum NTS Level I or II training or equivalent
9. In-house training must be led by credentialed instructors
10. Customers thoroughly instructed on all system operations
11. Checklists used for installers and customers
12. Unique or additional initiatives (e.g. video verification)
13. Development of strong working relationship with local law enforcement
14. Properly calculating and actively reducing false dispatch rate

customer service team to monitor and review the alarms. They address what caused an alarm and identify if additional training is needed or a service call is required to address a performance issue. *Protocol* and standards is the responsibility of the management team. Company leadership evaluates solutions to ensure we are offering the optimal equipment to our customers. Additionally, management holds the team accountable to the standards of operation that we have in place for customer satisfaction.

What modifications of the plan had to be made along the way? What are some areas you would still like to see improvement?

Ken Zahn: We identified that a higher value needed to be placed on customer training than it had been given in the past. It was an area that needed more attention and we created a process to ensure all customers receive adequate training. This involved us dedicating a trainer to all new customers and making sure existing customers have access to training resources, such as quick-start guides, training videos, help desk support and onsite training if needed.

How costly of an undertaking was it; how did you budget and what is the ROI?

Zahn: We didn't incur significant upfront costs other than additional time spent internally and with customers that will be recouped in customer satisfaction, customer longevity and reducing

false alarms. The reduction in false dispatches creates community goodwill, which supports our reputation as a security leader in our market.

How difficult was it to get Schmidt's personnel to conform to the policies and procedures?

Christin Dingess: Once we talked through the "why" we were putting more of a focus on training and reducing false dispatches it wasn't very difficult. We provided resources for our technicians that supported the initiative and generated more buy-in. We developed quick-start guides for all our standard products so the customer has comprehensive information at their fingertips to know how to operate their new technology. This made it easier for the technicians to provide training as they had a step-by-step process to follow and leave-behind materials to help the customer after the installation and initial training.

How do you coordinate efforts between your installation/service and wholesale monitoring provider? What does each side bring to the table?

Troy Bright: Schmidt Security Pro partners with CMS to provide the central station monitoring services. CMS provides several tools that help our team manage false dispatches.

These include CMS' Compass software that provides a dealer "dashboard" that includes critical real-time information to our internal team



Schmidt sends mobile-friendly electronic surveys to customers to gain feedback for installations, service and inspections. Based on results, management acts to work toward constant improvement.

that allows us to identify and manage customer locations with repeat alarm issues. This software also allows our technicians to remotely view account history, individual zone alarms or trouble conditions, as well as immediately put systems in “test” mode prior to servicing any system.

Additionally, we have a close relationship with CMS where they regularly ask us to provide feedback and information related to the services and technology their dealers use.

Overall, CMS brings us the resources required to provide a high level of service including trained personnel, software, UL certifications, and redundant communications and power equipment — even redundant physical locations. All that comes without the extremely large capital expense that would otherwise be required. They do a great job of focusing on the 24/7/365 monitoring aspect of the business, which allows us to focus on the customer-facing installation and service side of the business.

What have been the customer challenges implementing the plan? Have any problem accounts become more problematic?

Dingess: As mentioned, we have developed quick-start guides for all systems to get new customers started. This gives the customer a go-to resource for any initial questions or concerns and has been a tremendous help with our residential and small-business customers. However, for more complex customer environments there are varying needs and level of service required.

We have a dedicated systems trainer to coordinate training for multisite organizations with integrated systems. Overall, the feedback has been very positive because the customers appreciate the time spent on training and having the resources they need to answer questions or request service.

Also, we have a dedicated help desk to provide remote service that allows customers to get answers to their questions quickly and initiate a service request if needed. The help desk also supports our technicians by providing troubleshooting assistance when they are onsite without adequate resources. The help desk takes advantage of the real-time view of central station information with the CMS Compass software. We can easily identify system events or troubles as they are happening.

What have been the implementation challenges on the law enforcement side?



How did you get their buy-in?

Schmidt: We have always worked to have a positive relationship with law enforcement. Before my father (Bill Schmidt) started the business in 1976 he was a police officer. I have several other family members involved in law enforcement, and [COO] Ken Zahn is a former sheriff's deputy and investigator. So we understand the challenges a false dispatch creates, and strive to continue to find ways to lower false dispatch numbers.

Frequent communication with alarm administrators, 911 dispatchers, police department shift commanders, safety-service directors, police chiefs, etc. has helped us maintain overall good relations with law enforcement. From a larger perspective, the current trend toward reducing funding and an increased negative sentiment toward law enforcement point toward increased opportunities for providers of private security solutions.

Zahn: We believe police response is still a critical component of protecting the communities in which we live and work. Customers value having a timely response by law enforcement. Good, consistent communication with law enforcement addressing any concerns with customer false dispatches can go a long way toward maintaining police response.

How have the results meshed with your projections and expectations?

Dingess: The data from one local municipality shows a false dispatch reduction of almost 40%

Schmidt has invested in electronic ticketing software so all service requests are tracked electronically and can be managed in real-time. And all technicians use electronic tablets to receive and complete work orders and job tickets.

“ Schmidt Security Pro recognizes as a professional security installer it is our responsibility to take the lead in false alarm reduction. ”

— Brian Schmidt



At Schmidt, new employees participate in a structured onboarding process that involves spending time with different departments within the company to understand what everyone does and how their job ties in with others.

during the past 10 years. We feel it's a combination of adopting industry standards such as Enhanced Call Confirmation and CP01, better technology, staff and customer training, as well as communications with customers and awareness that's led to the improvement.

False alarm reduction also has a correlation with customer retention. Customers who are experiencing false alarms and consistent issues may become unhappy and look to make a change. We believe if we can identify these issues sooner, communicate with the customers and fix any issues better and faster we'll have better customer retention.

How are advances in communications and other technologies affecting alarm management?

Bright: The advances in communication are helping us and our customers to have more remote access and control of their systems. This helps us better support our customers and provide additional solutions for service and support. It's beneficial whenever we can avoid extra costs associated with going onsite.

Schmidt: The ability to remotely manage and make programming changes to alarm systems has been one of the biggest changes I've seen in the industry. When the PDQ program began 15 years ago, our only option was to put a tech in a truck and go onsite to determine what may be triggering an alarm, make changes to programming, etc. Today, we can see all aspects of system programming, user actions, trouble conditions, alarms, etc. remotely. We can also diagnose issues and often even make changes to a system that will address reasons for a false dispatch — without ever going onsite.

Also, the ability to communicate faster and in many different ways with our customers has helped to improve alarm management. Fifteen years ago, we would make a phone call and maybe use email to communicate with customers. Now, we communicate with customers in a variety of different ways including phone, email, text messaging, social media, video messages/video links, our website, etc. This provides various avenues for us to get the right information to the customer quickly — in the format that best suits their needs.

What about video verification as a tool to mitigate false alarms? Is this being

provided by or investigated by Schmidt?

Zahn: As more cameras are deployed, they will definitely become a tool to help verify alarms. We currently have customers who receive video alerts when their system has an alarm. This gives the customer an opportunity to cancel the alarm with our central station. We're also exploring scenarios where the CMS operator is sent video along with the alarm signal and has the opportunity to verify the alarm using the video.

This makes a lot of sense, however, some challenges include the cost of having video in every location alarm sensors are being used at a customer site, as well as the lack of broadband for a video feed in some remote areas we do business.

Schmidt: Technologies such as cameras with video analytics and improved outdoor detection solutions are becoming available and will provide us — and our customers — with improved options for detecting intruders and notifying law enforcement when there's an actual threat while minimizing false triggers. We see where using these new technologies alongside much of the legacy technology will lead the way in continuing to reduce false dispatches for professional security companies.

Do you see DIY or MIY having an impact on false alarms?

Schmidt: In the grand scheme of things, DIY and MIY are fairly new concepts — professionals have been installing alarms for almost 150 years! When a system is not professionally installed there is more opportunity for errors that result in false alarms. I believe the recent influx of DIY and MIY options has led to new challenges for law enforcement and municipalities that include false alarms, managing alarm permits, slow response to equipment issues, etc.

What are some of Schmidt's overall keys to its business and operations success?

Bright: The mission of Schmidt Security Pro is to positively impact our customers, co-workers and community. This is posted on the wall in each department and in other common areas of our building. Having this mission engrained in our daily operations ensures that our employees feel valued, our customers receive excellent service and we provide community support. Therefore, this mission drives the products we choose, the standards in which we operate and guides our decision-making processes. **SSI**



B Safe Cracks Down on False Alarms

Founded in 1978, today B Safe Security is a leading regional provider of monitored security and fire/life-safety systems to more than 26,000 clients in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

“B Safe Security has been committed to reducing false police dispatches since the 1990s,” says B Safe President Phil Gardner, who has spent 38 years with the company. “Our standard practice has always been to call the subscriber on any alarm; ‘Don’t call us, we’ll call you.’ This reduces and eliminates the need and time for customers to call us to cancel an alarm.” That’s an example of the companywide commitment to reducing false alarms that earned B Safe a PDQ runner-up citation.



B Safe credits its false alarm success to proper customer training at installation, standard dispatch procedures for every system that are easy for the customer to understand and the use of new technologies.

In addition, B Safe Security strongly recommends subscribers use their alarm keypad arm/disarm code as the passcode for monitoring station to cancel alarms. According to Gardner, the firm’s average customer only triggers their alarm system once every 18 months on average, which means subscribers frequently forget potentially obscure passwords they set months ago prior when their system was first installed. Needing to recall it so seldomly, they tend to struggle or fail to come up with the arm/disarm code when they need it.

“By just implementing that simple, standard procedure, the New Castle [Del.] Police told us we had the lowest false dispatch rate of any alarm company of size in their jurisdiction. Back in 2007, with the assistance of B Safe, the Delaware Alarm Association and SIAC, the state of Delaware implemented two-call verification as the standard alarm response required for all alarm companies. B Safe has expanded that practice to all the states we do business in.”

That action, says Gardner, has led to B Safe not having any customers cancel their monitoring services due to excessive false dispatches or caused them to incur the jurisdictional fines imposed since the implementation of two-call verification. B Safe also installs and programs every system in accordance with the SIA CP-01 control panel standard, which provides for a 60-second exit/entry delay and other proven false alarm prevention best practices.

“More recently, with the advent of new remote interactive technologies,” continues Gardner, “one method that has been successful in helping further reduce our false alarms due to the customer not being able to disarm the system within the 60-second entry delay period is through an Alarm.com offering called Pending Alarm.”

Marketed by Alarm.com as Crash & Smash detection, this technology works during the alarm panel’s dialer delay. The property remains protected even if an intruder locates and destroys the panel or otherwise circumvents the system’s entry delay and finds another way in. As soon as the security system goes into an alarm state, a pending alarm signal is transmitted to Alarm.com and can be routed to the central station, even if an ‘Alarm’ message is not received shortly after due to panel damage.

“Pending alarm notifications are included with full alarm notifications. It is not possible to receive full alarm notifications and not receive pending alarm notifications,” explains Gardner. “Another way we help prevent false dispatches is with the use of Alarm.com Notifications.”

In that scenario, when an event occurs Alarm.

com alerts the recipients who have been selected to receive the notification the opportunity to determine if there is a true alarm prior to receiving the verification call. In doing so they can then determine if a dispatch of the authorities is necessary.

“With proper customer training at installation, simple, standard dispatch procedures for every system that are easily understood by the customer, plus new technologies, false dispatches are a non-issue for B Safe,” concludes Gardner. **SSI**

PDQ AWARD HONOR ROLL

2006 Vector Security, Warrendale, Pa.

2007 Brink’s Home Security, Irving, Texas

2008 Alarm Detection Systems, Aurora, Ill.

2009 Atronic Alarms, Lenexa, Kan.

2010 Broadview Security, Irving, Texas

2011 Custom Alarm, Rochester, Minn.

2012 HS Technology Group, Baltimore

2013 Vector Security, Warrendale, Pa.

2014 Monitronics, Dallas

2015 Habitec Security, Holland, Ohio

2016 Amherst Alarm, Buffalo, N.Y.

2017 EPS Security, Grand Rapids, Mich.

2018 Alarm Detection Systems, Aurora, Ill.

2019 Guardian Protection, Warrendale, Pa.

2020 Elite Interactive Services, Los Angeles

2021 Schmidt Security Pro, Mansfield, Ohio

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