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**OFFICE SECURITY
& ALARM
SYSTEMS:
IMPORTANT
FACTS YOU
SHOULD KNOW**



Securing Your Business: How to Choose the Best Security & Alarm Monitoring Company

Every year, theft and vandalism costs businesses billions of dollars in terms of lost merchandise and costly business equipment. Such crimes also take a toll on businesses because of the resulting lost data and personal information their customers have entrusted them with. Alarm systems offer more than just a way to protect against intruders. Many businesses also sustain a significant amount of loss due to theft by their own employees.

Fortunately, many such incidents can be prevented through the use of monitored commercial alarm systems. A monitored burglar alarm system will ensure the safety of your company and its employees by helping to deter burglars and eliminate employee theft. Monitored alarm systems detect unauthorized entry through a series of monitoring devices. When an intruder is detected, the alarm system transmits a signal to a central monitoring station. These nation-wide centers provide year-round, twenty-four hour service and will immediately notify local police so they can dispatch officers to the scene when needed.

Most alarm systems are very straightforward and user-friendly. Once you find a good vendor and determine what type of security system will work best for your establishment, you should be able to have the system of your choice installed and operating within one or two business days. This guide is designed to familiarize you with the various types of office alarm and security systems and to assist you in choosing the right vendor for your company.

How the Central Station is Monitored

To make an informed purchasing decision it's vital that you understand the role of the central monitoring station. This is the part of your security system that actually does the work of protecting your establishment.

The system's control panel, which is connected to the phone lines, will be programmed with information regarding your business location and other important details. When an intrusion is detected and the alarm system is tripped, the control panel will relay all the relevant information to the central monitoring station. Within ten seconds, the central station will contact your office, either by phone or, if you have dual-communication monitoring, by speaking directly through the security keypad intercom.



If security personnel reach a live person they will confirm this person's authorization by asking for their pass-code. If they receive no answer, or an incorrect pass-code is given, the central station will immediately alert the authorities. They will then contact a designated key-holder, someone within the company who will determine whether a break-in has occurred.

Internally managed central stations are required to alert authorities within forty-five seconds whenever the alarm goes off. They are also required to have a reliable backup power source in place. This can be either a second station or a backup generator with ten to fifteen days of reserve power.

Your company's central monitoring station may be located outside your state, but this should not pose a problem. However, you will want to find out how the station operates and how they will be monitoring your alarm system.

How Monitoring Stations Reduce False Alarms

False alarms are a major concern for both the security industry and authorities. Both groups are focusing efforts to prevent their occurrence. The safety and protection of your business is important, but calling local authorities to a scene where they are not actually needed can take valuable time away from true emergency situations.

Audible delay alarms, which have a programmed delay of between forty-five and sixty seconds before sounding, are one tool to help prevent false alarms. This delay allows time for an authorized employee or visitor to supply the appropriate security code or to otherwise verify their identity before the central station contacts the authorities.

Cellular back-ups can also be used to avoid false alarm calls. Activation of the back-up will alert the monitoring station to potential problems with the regular phone line. This gives the monitoring station the opportunity to call your company's key-holder, who will check the offices and see what the problem is. Only if the key-holder discovers that someone tampered with the phone lines will the authorities be called to the scene.

Main Components of a Monitored Burglar Alarm System

Control Panels - Power for the entire alarm system is located in the control panel, which is connected to all the other alarm components.

The control panel is usually installed in a concealed location, either in the roof or the server closet, to prevent the possibility of the system being disabled by an intruder.



Security keypads - Installed near the main entrance, the security keypad will allow employees to enter and exit the office. A digital readout on the pad will state whether the system is activated.

Some keypads are equipped to allow two-way communication so someone stationed at the central monitoring station can speak directly through this device to someone on the outside. This enables security personnel or other authorized persons to verify the authorization of someone who has triggered the alarm.

Extra keypads can be installed at secondary locations if you choose. The cost for each additional keypad is approximately \$100.

Motion Detectors - When an intruder enters the area, the motion detector, also known as a passive infrared (PIR) detector, will sense the changes in infrared energy levels and trigger the alarm.

Door and Window Contacts - These are magnetic devices placed alongside window frames and door jambs to trip the alarm system when a window or door is opened.

Glass-Break Sensors - Sensitive devices that will trigger the alarm when they sense the acoustic shock waves caused by breaking glass.

Sirens - Extremely loud horns, often accompanied by strobe lights, can be affixed to the interior and exterior of your building to draw immediate attention to any intrusion.

Hard-Wired vs. Wireless

You will have the option of choosing monitored alarms in either a hard-wired or wireless format. If your office is already equipped with wiring from a previous alarm system, it can be very simple to add a monitored alarm to the existing wiring. A wireless system can be more practical to install when there is no existing wiring. Wireless equipment can be put in place without drilling walls, lifting carpets or otherwise disturbing the work area.

Instant Alarm vs. Audible Delay systems

An instant, loud alarm, while not actually alerting authorities, can still be a very effective means of frightening off intruders before they have a chance to do any damage to company property.



Another option is to have an audible delay system installed. This setup will initially trigger the alarm before any sirens are activated. This system is designed to help authorities catch intruders while they are committing a crime. It will enable you, for example, to apprehend any disgruntled employees who enter your facilities with the intention of stealing equipment or corrupting valuable files.

Supplementary Features

You will have several additional feature options to enhance your basic monitored burglar alarm system and increase your level of protection. There are also features designed to protect your alarm service in the event of a system failure.

Backup Systems - Most monitored burglar alarm systems provide the option of having 24-hour backup that commences whenever your phone lines are down. A cellular or radio system will transmit a signal to the central monitoring station when a phone line is dropped.

In the event that all electrical power is lost, a backup battery will activate to keep your alarm in service. If your organization relies on Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone service, having a backup system is vital. Since VoIP technology is governed by different standards than traditional phone systems, most alarm systems will require a backup system to transmit the monitored signal via VoIP.

Two-Way Monitoring - With a two-way monitoring system, security personnel at the central monitoring station will be able to communicate directly with your office. Your security keypad will serve as an intercom system, allowing the monitoring service to check an employee's identity if they accidentally trip the alarm.

Open and Close Schedule Monitoring - Schedule monitoring allows you to track who has opened or closed your office. One means of doing this is with a supervised system that informs you exactly when and by whom your security system was armed or disarmed. The central monitoring station can also notify you if the system has been left unarmed.

Another option is a non-supervised system, which will simply monitor when the alarm is armed and disarmed. You can obtain this information by calling the central monitoring station for the alarm status.

Fire Alarm - Simple smoke detectors are not adequate for most businesses. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has set forth guidelines for commercial fire alarms. Your vendor can install a fire alarm that complies with these regulations and is appropriate for your building.



Video surveillance - You may wish to supplement your burglar alarm system with surveillance equipment. Your options here include everything from a video camera and monitor to complex systems that include closed circuit television (CCTV), digital recorders and cameras in multiple locations. Such systems will also require additional security personnel.

Access control - This type of alarm system requires employees to use special cards to enter the building or certain restricted areas. This allows you to track when your employees enter and exit your office building. Each card features a magnetic strip or other technology that works with the entry system located outside a locked entrance.

How to Select a Commercial Alarm System Vendor

When you're ready to purchase a monitored office alarm system, speak with a few different dealers before you have your system installed. This will give you an idea of the types of alarm systems each vendor provides as well as how the systems are priced. A reputable commercial company will send a representative meet with you at your location to conduct a risk assessment of your facilities. They should discuss with you your security challenges and offer recommendations regarding security solutions that will best suit your needs.

Your next step will be to obtain written quotes from at least three different companies. Make sure each quote includes setup and monthly monitoring fees, equipment costs and warranties. Even if the first company you speak to offers you a competitive price on your ideal alarm system, take the time to meet with two or three more vendors. Each offer may include a different mix of security and pricing for you to consider.

Next you will want to obtain references from each vendor. Reputable companies should be able to supply you with a list of satisfied clients who have given permission to be contacted. These clients can answer your questions regarding the quality of service they received from their security system provider. Be ready to ask questions such as:

- Was the vendor's contract clearly written, with all pricing details disclosed?
- Did they install the equipment within a reasonable time frame?
- Was a customer service representative available to resolve any issues?
- Did the dealer provide adequate training for you and your employees?
- Does the company allow visits to central monitoring station?
- Have you had an intrusion, and if so, did the central station dispatch authorities promptly?



- Does the dealer work with central monitoring stations who comply with guidelines established by watchdog organizations such as Underwriters Laboratories?
- Will the alarm company notify you before they sell your contract to a different central station?

Verify any dealer you're considering with outside organizations such as the Attorney General's office, the Better Business Bureau and the National Burglar & Fire Alarm Association (NBFAA). These organizations can provide you with additional information on the quality of a vendor's service and tell you whether the company has all required licenses in place.

Pricing and Contracts

- Standard monthly fees for service run between \$25 and \$40 per month.
- Initial setup fees may vary based on the type of equipment, the number of security devices installed and the size of the company. You can expect to pay anywhere from \$100 to \$4,000 for equipment and installation, depending on the complexity of the system you choose.
- If you choose dual communication capabilities and radio or cellular backup in case the phone line is disabled will usually add about \$10.00 to your monthly service fees.
- Tracking systems such as open and close schedule monitoring can cost an additional \$250.00 to \$600.00 per year.
- Most of the basic equipment for your monitored commercial alarm system is provided as part of your contract and you will retain ownership of it after the contract expires. This includes such items as motion detectors, door contacts and glass break sensors. If your vendor provides leased equipment only, the \$300 to \$500 per year leasing fees can be incorporated into your monthly fees.
- Some police departments require businesses to obtain annual permits for their monitored commercial alarm system. If so, you will need both a state monitoring permit with local police and an electrical permit in order to install and monitor the alarm system. There may also be a low-voltage alarm permit mandated by the city. These permits should only amount to between \$5 and \$40 per year.



A standard contract will involve a three-year obligation, but some vendors do offer a month-to-month agreement as well. Your contract will detail your rights as a customer and should also guarantee that your fees will not increase. Most vendors will assess a substantial fee for terminating the contract before the agreed upon expiration. This fee can be from 75 to 100 percent of your remaining fees due.

Installation of a wireless commercial alarm system in a relatively small office (approximately 2,000 sq ft) will usually take about four to eight hours. Larger projects such as warehouses of 100,000 sq ft may take a few weeks to complete.

Be sure to review your contract thoroughly before signing. Check over the pricing details, being alert for hidden fees, such as a fee to connect to the central station. Typically, the cost for this will be built into the pricing and should not appear as an additional fee.

Monitored Fire Alarm Pricing

If you want fire protection for your business, you will need to have a commercial fire alarm system installed. The system should comply with occupational health requirements and NFPA building codes. These codes will determine the specific components you'll need based on factors involving your location and your industry. Your fire alarm will be connected to a central monitoring service in the same manner as your burglar alarm.

Fire alarm pricing is based on total square footage. Your system will cost from \$1 to \$5 per square foot of office space. Complex installations such as systems that require a new sprinkler system can run as high as \$10 to \$25 per square foot. Monthly monitoring service for fire alarms costs between \$40 and \$50, and maintenance agreements can add an additional \$5 to \$10 per month.

Commercial Alarm System Warranties

Warranties can vary. Many alarm dealers offer an extension of the short-term warranty and will include maintenance agreements to cover parts, labor and technician service fees.

Some companies provide a 90-day installation warranty that covers parts and labor, while others offer warranties that extend from one year up to the life of the service contract.

Avoid signing up with a company that offers no warranty whatsoever. Be sure your alarm system includes a warranty that will at least cover parts and labor so you can have complete confidence that your system will be operational at all times.



Additional Considerations

- Most monitored commercial alarm system providers install name-brand or private label equipment that works with most central monitoring stations. Some companies, however, install proprietary equipment that is only compatible with their own licensed monitoring stations.
- Be aware of any master programming or lockout codes that can prevent you from changing codes on your own or making adjustments to your system. You may also be prevented from changing monitoring services when your contract is up. If you own your equipment, make sure you have full access to all of these codes.
- The size of the company you'll be dealing with is another factor that might affect your decision. Fewer than ten companies actually manufacture the monitoring equipment for commercial alarm systems. These companies provide equipment for thousands of alarm system dealers who in turn sell and install the systems. Dealers can range in size from major corporations with their own sales force to small resellers who function as independent security companies or as authorized third-party installers for larger companies.
- Some of the smaller alarm system companies contract the services of third-party central stations, while many larger companies operate their own central monitoring stations, enabling them to monitor thousands of homes and businesses. The larger companies are held to a higher standard through verification by the independent, non-profit Underwriters' Laboratories (UL). Large alarm system companies pay the UL to test their products and services to ensure maximum reliability and safety. The cost of their services will therefore be higher than what the smaller companies and third-party administrators charge. Whether you choose to use the services of a large or small company, most alarm installers will provide all the services and equipment involved in a monitored alarm security system.



- Avoid purchasing an alarm system from door-to-door sales people known as “trunk slammers.” As the name suggests, these individuals will attempt to sell you an alarm system from their car, then slam the trunk and drive away once the sale is complete. They usually offer very cheap or even free alarm systems to customers who sign up for a long-term monitoring contract. Most are unlicensed dealers who operate out of their home and may not carry proper business insurance. They do not conduct an assessment of your company’s facilities to determine which type of system you will need. Although the system may appear to be free, the equipment may simply be leased, and the fees will be built into your monthly contract. When the contract is up, the alarm company can take back the equipment if you don not renew. Such details are usually not explained by the sales person. Trunk slammers will often purchase several alarm systems from a larger company at a deep discount. They then sign up customers and sell the signed contracts to the alarm company. Customers may be left not knowing who to turn to for service or who to contact for help with questions or problems.

Office Alarm User Tips

- Do not set your security monitoring alarm to call 911 when the alarm is triggered. Doing so is illegal and can result in a large fine or even jail time.
- Most insurance companies require a security monitoring alarm, but installing one can have additional benefits. When you verify that you have a monitoring alarm system in your office, your insurance rates can be reduced by as much as ten to twenty percent.
- Some security monitoring alarm systems come with a duress signal option. If you are ever forced to let an intruder in and you have to disable the alarm, you can do so using a duress code which will alert the central monitoring station that you were forced to provide access into your building.
- If you need to make changes to your alarm system, such as adding or deleting pass-codes when employees are hired or terminated, most providers will make the adjustments for you or offer you the option to make the changes yourself.
- Once your office alarm system is installed, all employees will need to know how to use it. Most systems are very simple to use. Your vendor should be able to train one or two key people in a matter of only ten or twenty minutes. These individuals can then have a group session to educate the rest of the company’s personnel in the proper use of they alarm system.



- Before installing your alarm system, security monitoring alarm vendors are required to find out if you use a communication system other than POTS. If they fail to do so they could be held liable for any losses you experience should the alarm signal not go through. You should also be sure to notify your provider if you make any changes to your phone system, such as converting your traditional system to VoIP, so they can test the system.
- By working a quality alarm company, one that will take the time to understand your needs and provide you with the best solutions for your business, you can be assured of the utmost protection for your business and its employees.

One of the most efficient ways to compare vendors and obtain price quotes based on your company's unique needs is to use the services of a company like InsideUp, which can provide [custom quotes](#) from up to five security alarm system vendors.

Glossary

Access Control System

These systems not only control access, they provide security badging options, and track employee and equipment movements in and out of the premises or restricted areas, and can automate time and attendance reporting. American Alarm also works with the leading edge of biometric systems, including hand, fingerprint and facial recognition systems.

Alarm Monitoring

When your alarm is triggered by an intrusion or fire at your property, the signal will transmit to a team of certified operators who will dispatch and make notification of the incident.

Alarm System

An alarm system consists of any mechanism that triggers an audio or visual alert to warn of a problem, such as a fire or a burglar entering.

Burglar Alarm

A burglar alarm is a mechanical system used to scare off burglars if they breach the protected area with a loud bell or siren. When monitored by a certified central station the property has the added protection of the local authorities being notified at the time of the incident.



Business Security System

A business security system protects your business, employees, property and your competitive advantage. In addition to a burglar alarm an integrated business security system can include access control, video surveillance and recording, monitoring of environmental conditions and more.

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide gas or CO is a by-product of burning fossil fuels. It is a colorless, odorless, and highly toxic gas. A 0.1% concentration of carbon monoxide can be deadly. Some common household sources of carbon monoxide are old or leaky furnaces, blocked gas or appliance vents, fireplaces, stoves, vehicles in attached garages, and even tobacco smoke. Carbon monoxide is a serious and common concern as it is present in almost every home in very small concentrations.

Carbon Monoxide Monitor / Detector

A device that monitors the presence and levels of carbon monoxide gas in a given area. If carbon monoxide is detected an alarm is sounded to notify occupants to vacate the area.

Carbon Monoxide Monitoring

If the Carbon Monoxide Monitor is tripped a signal will be sent to the central station and the proper authorities will be notified to respond.

CCD

CCD (charge-coupled device) is a type of image sensor. In effect, it is the "eye" of a camera phone, digital camera, or video camera. It is a device similar to a computer chip, which senses light focused on its surface, like electronic film.

CCTV

CCTV is frequently used in video surveillance systems. CCTV (closed circuit television) is a television system in which signals are not publicly circulated; cameras are linked to television monitors in a restricted region such as a store, an office building, or on a college campus.

CCTV Surveillance System

Closed circuit television video surveillance systems are often used for security purposes.

Decoders

A tool or program that deciphers encoded data into its original arrangement. The term is frequently utilized in mention to MPEG-2 video and sound data, which must be decoded before it can be produced.



Digital Video Monitoring System

Digital monitoring systems are video security systems that can be used with a VCR, DVR, or personal computer.

DVR

A Digital Video Recorder (DVR) is a device that records video to a hard disk in digital format.

DVR CCTV Recorder

DVR CCTV Recorders record actions on a surveillance camera on closed circuit television that can be used for later viewing.

Electronic Surveillance System

Electronic Surveillance Systems can protect homes from break-ins, burglary, and assault. They can be in the form of burglar alarms that notify the police, security cameras, and closed circuit television systems.

Emergency Response Locator

An emergency response locator is a sign placed in your yard to help deter would be burglars and to assist fire, police and medical personnel find your property easily. The signs are marked with reflective numbers that are easily visible day or night.

Environmental Monitoring

A threat to your home or business that comes from internal mechanical failures or extreme environmental conditions. These failures/conditions include HVAC system failure; extreme temperatures, both hot and cold; a buildup of water either from a plumbing failure or flood conditions, or high levels of dangerous gases, such as propane, carbon monoxide or natural gas. Monitoring of these threats is crucial to the safety of your home or work environment.

Fire Alarm

A fire alarm is a mechanical system used to detect smoke and/or heat. When monitored by a certified central station the property has the added protection of the local authorities being notified to respond at the time of the incident. American Alarm proposes all fire alarm systems to be compliant with Massachusetts State building codes and NFPA 72.

Home Security

Home security is crucial in order to protect your family, house, property and possessions.

Home Security System

A home security system is a complete system that secures a home from various threats and catastrophic events.



Proximity Card

Proximity card, also called a “prox card”, is a generic name for contactless integrated circuit device. They are used for security access, control applications, or payment systems. The cards communicate with an external antenna by utilizing their embedded metallic coil. For this RF antenna to be read, close proximity is required.

Remote Video Monitoring

Remote Video Monitoring (RVM) systems supply a method of automatically obtaining video information from isolated locations and transferring them to a central station workstation for processing.

Remote Security Alarm

Remote Video Monitoring (RVM) systems supply a method of automatically obtaining video information from isolated locations and transferring them to a central laboratory workstation for processing.

Remote Video Surveillance

See Remote Video Monitoring.

Remote Access

Remote access is the ability to get access to a computer or a network from a remote distance. In corporations, people at branch offices, telecommuters, and people who are traveling may need access to the corporation's network. American Alarm uses remote access to make simple programming changes to our systems that would have required a service call in the past and to update and make changes to access control system data at the request of our customers.

Smart Card

Smart Cards, also known as integrated circuit cards (ICC), are plastic cards with embedded microchips that can be downloaded with data. Although there is a diverse range of applications, there are two broad categories of ICCs. With a smart card, one can make electronic cash payments, pay for parking, pay for public transportation, give personal information, and make other purchases. As far as personal safety is concerned, they are capable of providing security services (e.g. confidentiality of information in the memory).

Video Surveillance System

Video Surveillance Systems can protect homes and businesses from break-ins, burglary, and assault. They can be in the form of burglar alarms that notify the central station, security cameras, and closed circuit television systems.



VoIP

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) systems are the new low cost telephone services that send calls over the Internet instead of traditional phone lines or any other IP-based network.

VoIP Alarm

Not all VoIP systems are the same. Many deal with the phone traffic in ways that prevent alarm signal transmission entirely, or during peak calling periods. And because VoIP is currently unregulated by the FCC, companies are not yet required to resolve the potential problems with alarm signal transmission. At American Alarm we've been monitoring the development of VoIP systems and we've engineered methods to ensure your security system will still be able to send an alarm.