



Peter Manolescu

Opinion

What is the likely future for security provision in UK plc? In the first of a two-part discourse, Peter Manolescu challenges long-held perceptions by looking at the forces for change from without the industry, followed by an examination (in the March edition) of the technologies that will enable – and subsequently drive – the resulting trends.

The future's bright... and organised

THE FACT THAT TOMORROW WILL BE different from today is hardly an earth-shattering prediction. However, accurately identifying how it will differ is a challenging and important management task.

The original management consultant, Peter Drucker, isn't a great fan of futurologists. That said, he is a firm believer in the adage that you can glean a good understanding of what's coming by projecting the impact of events that have already happened.

However we might like to dress up the facts, it's difficult to get away from the stark truth that, in a perfect world, the need for security is non-existent. Our industry works against the most unpleasant elements of human nature and outrageous fortune. Most people – top management included – don't really want to think about such things. Security doesn't add to the bottom line revenue and profit of the company. For many directors, discussing security simply eats away at time that could be used to mull over 'real' operational issues.

As a result, when purchased on its own security will almost always be bought down to a price, and not up to a quality. Since the benefits of good security are often impossible to quantify, the desire to buy just enough to satisfy hungry insurers is one that's hard to argue against. In today's economic climate, organisations have to justify every penny.

Perceived threats may never materialise, so why spend the money?

Even a cursory glance at today's security industry would seem to suggest that all we can expect from now on is 'more of the same'. Much of the methodology and technology employed in the private sector during the past 20 years hasn't really changed at all. Yes, there have been some enhancements, but very few radical innovations.

However, the environment within which security practitioners are now being forced to operate is changing rapidly. By understanding those forces for change, security managers can bring value to their organisation and, at the same time, ensure that their own role is understood and appreciated.

Home working and 'hot desking'

Legislation to promote part-time and flexible working will expand. Transport problems (including gridlocked roads and overcrowded trains) will boost the trend for home working. With fewer employees in the office, 'hot desking' will share resources among the subset of people who come in on any given day.

Securing this more distributed organisation will give rise to new challenges. The old idea of creating a physical perimeter and placing everything and everyone of value directly behind it will have to be re-thought. How do you protect both people and data located many miles from the centre of operations?

Until recently, an architect designed a building, handing the details of construction to a civil engineer whose job it was to minimise construction costs. After the developer had sold the building, the new owner then had to figure out how to run it at least cost. This compartmentalisation is hugely expensive.

Over the first 25 years of the life of a building, initial construction cost can be as little as 15% of the total cost of ownership. Decisions taken on the drawing board can have a huge impact on operating bills. The expansion of facilities management is changing this. Cost analysis is filtering back down to the design. These analyses must include security, and managers should be consulted at the earliest possible stage.

Over the next decade or so, we're likely to see massive deregulation of the energy market. This is already well advanced Stateside, and progress in the European Union is underway. Firms will be able to buy energy from the lowest bidder on a daily or even an hourly basis. To attract business, suppliers will offer 'bundles' including gas, electricity, petrol and services such as telephone and security surveillance.

Integrating and managing all of this will require a new commercial and technical

framework. It's a framework that promises to offer major benefits when combined with another huge trend: outsourcing.

Focus on core competencies

For many years now, blue chip companies have attempted to focus on 'core competencies' while divesting themselves of non-essential services. In larger organisations, these have often been 'spun off' into profitable subsidiaries. Advanced technology has allowed this to go even further. Many companies are now outsourcing what were previously considered core competencies (Human Resources being a classic example).

As the data joins the people off-site, so the distinction between physical and IT security begins to blur still further.

In the past decade, IT networks have come to prominence even in the smallest of organisations. The move to wireless technologies is well under way, and will embrace all telephones and personal digital assistants. This inevitably means that people will interact continuously with their environment, whether inside or outside the building. The resulting flexibility of working must be matched by operation and systems. If the security arrangements are too rigid, they will hinder the organisation concerned.

The summation of all the aforementioned trends plus the advanced technology that we'll consider in the March edition will finally bring about the truly 'intelligent' building.

Scenarios involving voice-controlled lifts and lights are easy to imagine. What's less obvious is that the building itself will have to fit into the operational framework of the organisation.

The building will record and analyse the profile of its own use. Knowing the capital and running costs of all the required services, it will then try to optimise its functions. For example, it will suggest the relocation of a meeting into a recently used and heated room rather than bring the original selected one up to temperature. The building will also track and record the movements of all assets, people and objects valued by the company. By constructing operational profiles, it will also signal any anomalies and optimise company facilities.

Security of assets and operations will be core to the intelligent building. As such, the true value of good security will be fully realised and recognised. ■

■ Peter Manolescu is the founding director of SecurityXML

■ Next month: A detailed overview of the technologies that will bring about change in the private security industry

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