BEST PRACTICES FOR

KEEPING STUDENTS SAFE

by Paul Hefty

Securing a college or university is a difficult task. It's a big responsibility that affects the lives of the entire population on campus. For the past several years, statistics show overall school campus crime is declining, yet crime is always a risk. Campuses need to remain vigilant and continue to look for the best solutions to protect students, staff, and visitors.

Where to Begin?

You've decided your campus needs a new security plan or an update to an existing one. Where do you begin? First, determine the security needs and expectations of the campus and decision-makers. Then tailor a plan with your preferred integrator to help keep your project on track.

Determine Needs and Expectations

Any project will go more smoothly when decision-makers agree on goals and scope. Talk with administrators and the IT group to determine needs, capabilities, and expectations. Include staff, security personnel, students, and parents to offer valuable insight. Consider reaching out to local first responders, too; they are another great source of information. Effort in the early stages could help save time and money throughout the project.

Tailor a Plan

With input from stakeholders, you're ready to think about equipment, budgets, and policies. Security is not sold as a "one-size-fits-all" plan. You'll likely be working with an integrator to tailor a comprehensive plan designed specifically for your campus.

Indoor Risk Assessment

Building a comprehensive plan can be a major undertaking. It can include many stakeholders, such as representatives of campus security, police, administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents, local first responders, neighborhood residents, and nearby businesses. An outside security integrator who can bring a fresh view to the project often leads the effort. A good risk assessment is very comprehensive and involves a lot more than just checking the lights and rattling the doors. Expectations for students and staff members should be outlined in written policies and procedures. A risk assessment may take days to complete, but a thorough inspection can enhance security while saving costs. Considerations for this phase of assessment include the following:

Building Interiors

Security experts put an emphasis on entrances and how staff members control who gets inside. Doors, windows, and locks are checked to see if they can resist an attack. Ventilation ducts are looked at to make sure criminals can't use them to get inside.

Stairwells, Hallways, and Restrooms

Common areas get inspected to make sure they aren't creating opportunities to hide weapons or contraband.

Security Systems

Access control, video surveillance, burglar alarms, and communications are checked to confirm they're working as expected.

Signage and Visuals

An inspector also looks for signage and other visual indicators to aid the hearing impaired during an emergency.

Outdoor Risk Assessment

Tools used to protect building interiors are different than those used to secure outdoor spaces. Emergency stations, low-light cameras, landscaping, and other equipment take on greater importance. This part of the assessment considers the following elements:

Parking Lots and Garages

Parking lots, garages, and other exterior areas are examined to ensure they have adequate lighting, fencing, emergency stations, and security cameras.

Outdoor Facilities

A plan for monitoring athletic fields, walking trails, and other outbuildings should be developed, as these areas are frequent targets for illegal activity.

Surrounding Neighborhoods

Student housing, businesses, and traffic patterns are also considered in the overall strategy, since they can impact your security.

Annexes and Urban Campuses

The plan for dispersed campuses needs to include network-based security systems to bring information into a centralized security operations center.

Technologies to Consider

Once the initial assessment has been completed, the decision-makers can decide preventative security measures to put in place.

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Doors and Locks

Quality doors and locks are meant to effectively deter criminals from getting into buildings. The most effective security comes from the combination of a solid core wood or metal door plus an electromechanical lock. Unfortunately, glass doors are widely popular on campuses. If it's not possible to replace them, use weapon-resistant security film or stainless-steel screens on the glass. Additionally, electronic locks provide a high level of security. They integrate with access control and video intercoms so doors can be opened remotely. Staff members can use card readers and keypads to enter. Electronic locks eliminate the need for keys, which can be easily lost, stolen, or copied.

Access Control

Security experts agree that access control is a vital part of any campus security plan. Mobile credentialing is swiftly replacing badges. Security is enhanced as a person must have possession of a smartphone or tablet, a security code, or biometric confirmation to gain access. Biometrics such as fingerprints, iris scans, or facial recognition have become a new tool to authenticate students, staff, and campus visitors. There are no cards to lose or share, and enrollment in the system takes only a minute or two. Just like cards, time, day, and location restrictions can be added for each person. Campuses can combine card readers, keypads, and/or biometric readers for doors requiring absolute identity authentication.

Video Intercom

All campus doors should be locked, but visitors and volunteers need access to campus buildings. Video intercom systems are ideal in such situations. To properly control access into buildings, door stations are needed at the entrances. Depending on the system, you can select either master stations, guard stations, tenant stations, or mobile apps for visitor screening. Roaming guards and campus security can use mobile apps in lieu of a physical master or guard station. Tenant stations and mobile apps are perfect for dorms and student housing. A door station can be installed outside any entrance. When visitors push the call button, their faces and surrounding area are displayed on the inside station or mobile app. A two-way conversation begins, and if the visitor is approved, the door can be conveniently unlocked.

Visitor Management

The days of asking visitors to use pen-and-paper sign-in books are gone. Best practices now favor electronic visitor management systems (VMS). They're accurate, easy to operate, and

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Numerous studies have shown the presence of cameras is enough to deter many criminals. Simply put, criminals don't want to commit crimes when they know they are being watched. Today's cameras capture incredible detail. They provide round-the-clock, real-time views of campus buildings and outdoor areas.

enhance security. With these systems, visitors are asked to produce a government-issued photo ID which is swiped through a visitor management system. Within seconds, the person's information is checked against federal and state criminal databases and the national sex offender registry. A campus can also add its own custom watch lists. When properly implemented, watch lists provide protection from restraining orders, custodial issues, as well as providing the names of disgruntled former-employees and students. After the system clears a visitor, a temporary badge is printed with the person's name, picture, date/time, and area of campus approved to visit. Some badges automatically fade within a specific time frame to indicate the visitor's authorized time on campus has expired. Visitor information from multiple campus stations is stored in a central database and is easy to share with first responders during an investigation.

Cloud-Based Mobile Apps

Most of us use mobile devices to book travel plans, check the latest sports scores, and share news and photos with our families and friends. Apps can also be a valuable security tool. Some stay connected to a network 24/7, allowing officers to remotely patrol the campus while remaining tethered to a security operations center. Staff can monitor video, receive immediate notifications, open doors to approved visitors, and much more. Campuses can now create apps providing direct communication links between students and security officers. Some apps let students or staff submit voice or video messages to report a potentially dangerous situation. Students can choose to share their location with friends and family while traveling across campus.

Video Surveillance

Numerous studies have shown the presence of cameras is enough to deter many criminals. Simply put, criminals don't want to commit crimes when they know they are being watched. Today's cameras capture incredible detail. They provide round-the-clock, real-time views of campus buildings and outdoor areas. They help prevent dangerous

incidents and can limit the damage when events do occur. Video surveillance should cover building entries and perimeters, hallways, stairwells, cafeterias and commons, and libraries. Outdoor security cameras should monitor parking lots and garages, main campus thoroughfares, playgrounds, walking trails, and other remote areas.

Intrusion Alarms

Intrusion systems can protect people and valuable assets around the clock. Sensors create audible alarms when doors are forced open or windows are broken. Motion detectors sense people moving through buildings at night, during holidays, and weekends. Sensors can also protect HVAC and other campus equipment targeted by thieves.

Emergency Stations

A combination of highly visible towers, compact wall boxes, and emergency call stations offer distressed students an immediate way to call for help in remote areas.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Lastly, CPTED can make a good plan even better and is one of the least expensive ways to enhance security on campus. Lighting is important along pathways, in parking lots, in garages, and surrounding building perimeters. It deters criminals while security gets a better view. Fencing and gates help guide people into proper entrances. Trees or bushes along the perimeter should be removed so they cannot be used to climb over fences. Landscaping should be trimmed to allow views of doors and windows from the street. Thorny bushes directly beneath ground-floor windows can help discourage criminals from climbing through windows. Clear signage is also important. Make sure signs have easy-to-read fonts, offer consistent messages, and are visible throughout the campus.

Choosing the best array of strategies and technology for your campus security needs can be a daunting task, but a comprehensive plan can be developed and implemented to protect all campus stakeholders. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Paul Hefty started in Technical Support, building and modifying Aiphone intercoms. With his vast industry knowledge, he is now the manager of Technical Services and works closely with the Engineering and Sales Teams to help design new products for small-to-large scale applications.

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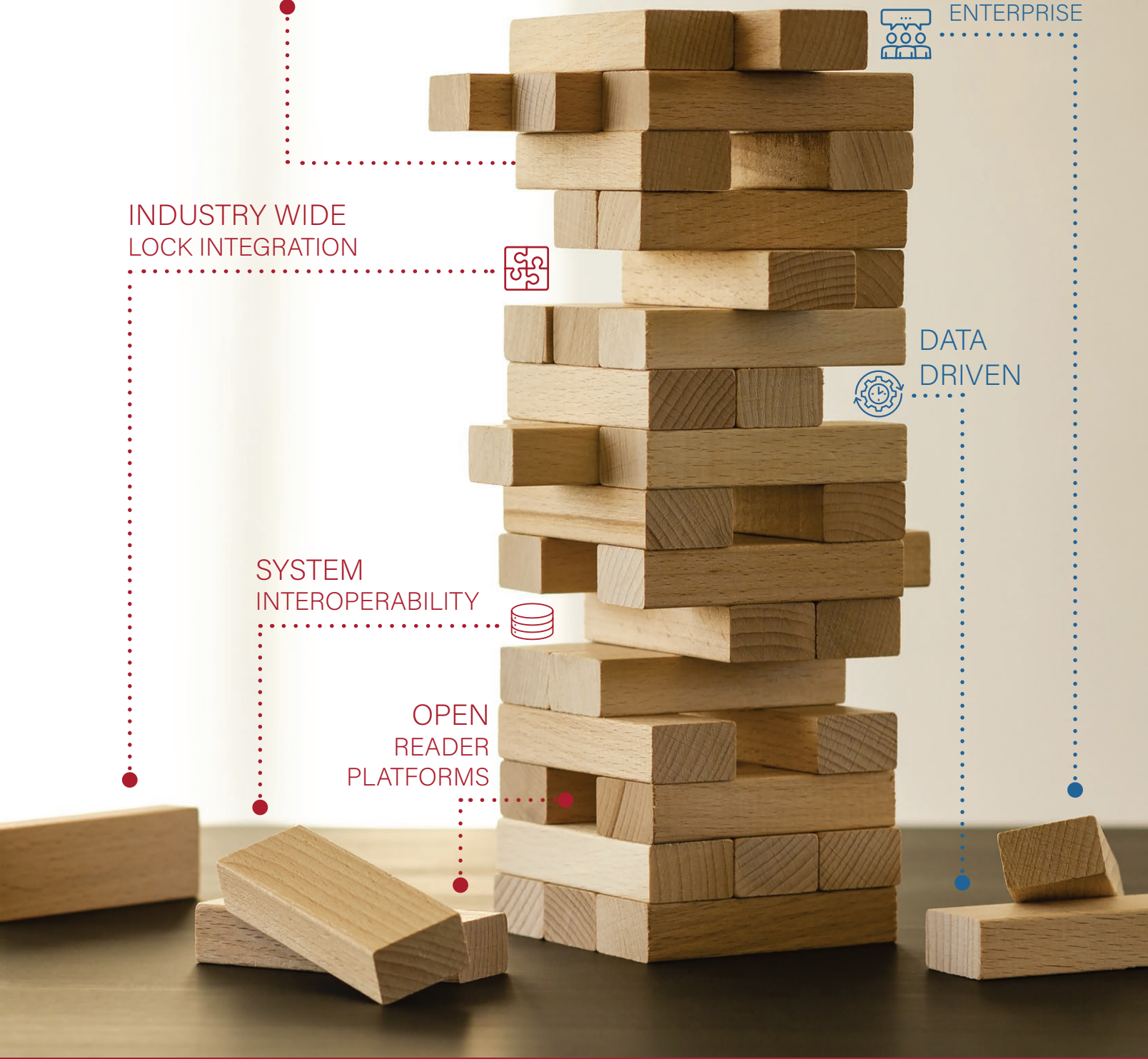

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