# Selling PSIM: Sophisticated Security Management Need Sophisticated Sales Techniques

by Joan Engebretson

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*The Greater Manchester Control Room used CNL's IPSecurityCenter to protect the annual Labour Party Conference.*

Physical security information management (PSIM) is an important new technology solution that enables end user organizations to integrate different types of security systems, such as access control and video. PSIM systems also provide logical control that correlates events from multiple systems to screen out false alarms and automatically brings crucial alerts to the attention of the organization's security staff.

Sophisticated systems such as these often require a complex selling process. In this article, SDM talks with buyers as well as sellers of PSIM about that process, obtaining their advice on how systems integrators become more successful at sealing PSIM deals.

## SALES PROSPECTS

Organizations that make the best prospects for PSIM tend to have at least 100 cameras, notes Pat Reilly, vice president of worldwide sales for Sunnyvale, Calif.-based PSIM manufacturer Proximex.

An organization's interest in PSIM tends to be triggered by a specific event, such as a move to a new location or a merger, notes Dave Fowler, senior vice president of product development and marketing for Marlborough, Mass.-based VidSys, another PSIM provider. Another prime time, Fowler says, is when an organization has a security breach, especially if it's highly visible — "or if there's an unusual situation, like the plane landing on the Hudson River. That gets people to rethink how they do cross-organizational situation management."

Whoever the prospect is, systems integrators interested in selling PSIM should prepare themselves for a long process. "The length of time and amount of meetings can be years and dozens and dozens of meetings," notes Reilly. He adds, though, that businesses tend to be able to make decisions more quickly than public organizations—and may require only about a six-month selling process.

The most time-consuming projects are those involving multiple agencies, each

with a stake in the decision. For some projects, PSIM is installed to meet government mandates relating to certain types of facilities, such as chemical manufacturing plants, water treatment plants or airports and seaports. Public facilities that must meet these requirements often may be able to obtain funding for their projects through grants, such as those from the Department of Homeland Security. Although these requirements typically do not specify PSIM, organizations that must meet these requirements may find that PSIM provides an excellent way of achieving that goal.

The idea that business is all about relationships is particularly true when it comes to PSIM.

Systems integrators typically enlist the help of the equipment manufacturer in selling PSIM — and sometimes the manufacturer may be the customer's initial point of contact. If a customer decides it wants to use a particular brand of equipment and asks the equipment manufacturer to recommend someone, the manufacturer will likely look for a good match from among integrators with whom it has experience, taking into account the location, type of installation and interpersonal dynamics.

In other cases, the systems integrator may be the client's first point of contact and may be the one to recommend the manufacturer. "Usually the systems integrator already has a relationship with the customer," observes Reilly "It's easiest to go into an established account and say, 'This is an upsell on something we've been providing for years.' Those sales go the fastest because there is already a contract vehicle in place, the relationships are in place and the trust factor is in place."

For large public jobs, the decision-making process may be highly structured, with numerous manufacturers and systems integrators responding to a written request for proposal (RFP). The larger the job, the more likely the organization will enlist the help of an independent consultant to help in writing the RFP.

"Some organizations bring us in during the early stages to help figure out what they want, define their requirements and issue the RFPs," notes Scott Rasplicka, chief executive officer of Home Port Solutions, a Savannah, Ga.-based consulting firm. "Others have brought us in later in the process when they're ready to release their RFP."

Decision makers and consultants may meet with a few manufacturers and decision makers prior to issuing the RFP but are restricted in their interactions once the RFP is issued. But here, too, strong relationships within the industry can help a systems integrator identify opportunities and meet with the customer before the RFP comes out. RFPs typically do not specify a particular

brand of equipment, but systems integrators can sometimes influence the types of functionality requested.

Organizations that plan to use the RFP process typically try to keep systems integrators "at arm's length," explains Fowler. But prior to issuing the RFP, these clients "will entertain discussions that are nothing more than the systems integrators showing the state of the technology or solutions that other organizations have done."

Erin Phelps, vice president of enterprise security solutions for McLean,Va.-based systems integrator CIBER Inc., says his company typically meets with PSIM customers at least 10 times as part of the sales process. "The more you meet with the client and understand their needs and how they interoperate and interact, the better you can tailor your PSIM solution to meet those needs," comments Phelps.

CIBER met with one port authority at least two dozen times over a year and a half prior to an RFP being issued, a factor that Phelps believes helped the company ultimately win the business. "We took various team members and technology partners," recalls Phelps. "We did site assessment and surveys. We went out on the water and did a great deal of research and analysis so that we felt very positive about knowing what the customer wanted. If you decide to bid on a project where you only had a couple of meetings, the probability of success is much, much lower."

As an alternative to the RFP process, corporate clients may issue a request for information (RFI) — an approach that entails fewer restrictions and commitments on the part of the decision-maker.

Considering how complex the decision-making process can be for some PSIM systems, systems integrators might expect to encounter difficulties getting the right people from the client side together in a meeting. But that's typically not a problem, sources say.

"They're usually pretty good about getting the right people there," comments Jimmy Palatsoukas, senior product manager for Genetec, a Montreal-based company that manufactures equipment with functionality similar to that of a PSIM system.

Systems integrators also may find that decision-makers are not as concerned with the return they will get on their investment as might be expected.

Customers on the public side are more likely to think of PSIM in terms of risk assessment, notes Fowler. If an organization determines that it could easily lose $100 million without proper security, it's easy to justify the system cost. In the corporate market, ROI is more likely to be a concern, in which case the ability to re-use existing components can be a key selling point, Fowler says.

Systems integrators also should be prepared to address concerns about equipment becoming obsolete. "Their number one concern is how flexible is the system," notes Matt Kushner, president of Indianapolis-based PSIM provider Computer Network Limited (CNL) Americas. "They want to know 'Will it evolve with us?' and 'Is it easy to make changes or will we have to deal with change order after change order?'"

**THE DECISION**

As customers get closer to making a decision about which PSIM system to purchase, they may ask to visit the site of another customer that has an operational system.

"You need to try to separate the demonstration from the reference," advises Fowler. Product demonstrations, he says, should be conducted in a separate meeting by the systems integrator or manufacturer with an eye toward the specific customer's requirements. The main purpose of the site visit, Fowler says, should be to give the customer the opportunity to ask "hard questions" such as "Are these guys responsive?" or "How hard is the system to use?" or "How long does it take to train your people?"

Often customers do not require a site visit, notes Kushner. "But 99 percent of the time, before the deal is done, they're going to ask 'Let me speak to two or three of your top references,'" he says.

Many clients narrow down the field of potential systems integrators to a small number prior to making the final decision—a ritual that Rasplicka goes through with virtually every organization he consults with. Rasplicka calls these final meetings "orals"—and they're particularly important in RFP situations, where the client may not previously have met the finalists.

Sometimes the people who look best on paper are disappointing in person, he says. "People need to be themselves," he advises. "Sometimes they put on airs."

Honesty is critical, adds Rasplicka. "If you haven't done something, admit it and

tell them how you will overcome it."

The final oral meetings are not the place to haggle over price, Rasplicka says. "If you're invited back, generally price is not the deciding factor. Just tell them what the price is and why it is. Sometimes we like to see them talk about the cost drivers. There might be a particular requirement that's making the cost significantly higher than it should be or could be. Maybe there are excessive wind requirements, for example. Give them an idea of things they can think about to show you've thought about this."

Often the final decision is a close call—and in those situations, personal interactions may be the deciding factor. "It usually spins around how well the company interacts with people on the selection committee," Rasplicka says.

It's a good idea to find out who will be in the meeting and be prepared to interact with each person. "Some people are looking at very specific details and some are looking at high-level management issues," Rasplicka says. "The interviewee who can reach out to all these guys tends to do better."

**The Buyer's Perspective**

The Port of Longview, a smaller port in the state of Washington, is one organization that used the RFP process in purchasing PSIM. The Port was able to obtain funding for a security system after obtaining a Homeland Security grant. To minimize the funding required, the grant called for a wireless system.

Jennifer Brown, director of information services for the Port of Longview, wrote the RFP herself after conducting her own research on cameras and searching the Internet for similar projects — a process that took about two months. After the RFP was developed, she sent it to vendors that had been calling on the Port. In addition the Port ran an ad to alert potential bidders about it.

"The document was about 15 to 20 pages," recalls Brown. As with most RFPs, no manufacturers were specified. Instead, the focus was on the capabilities required.

After the RFP was issued, Brown and other decision-makers conducted a site tour for people interested in bidding. They also answered questions from potential bidders about the RFP over the phone.

"We got about 12 responses," Brown recalls.

The Port set up a scoring system to rate proposals that came in. Cost comprised 30 percent of the total score; while hardware features, quality and design was 20 percent; software management was 20 percent; quality of the vendor was 20 percent and support and maintenance was 10 percent.

Committee members narrowed the field down to four proposals and invited each of those systems integrators in for an interview with themselves and one of the commissioners from the three-person board overseeing the Port.

At the interviews, Brown says, "We were looking for an explanation of the proposal — why they chose the cameras and wireless design and their reasoning. We also got to meet the project manager face-to-face."

The interview process narrowed the field of eligible contenders to two. One company was eliminated because the decision-makers felt the systems integrator was too reliant on the manufacturer for expertise; another was eliminated because "they wouldn't give us a firm price or design," Brown recalls.

The remaining two vendors were essentially a tie. The two proposals were sent to the commissioners, who ultimately made the final decision.

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