

CAMERAS/PERIMETER SECURITY FILL GAPS IN GATE ACCESS

Whether there is a crime, such as a home burglary or violent attack, or unauthorized entry that could lead to a crime, security organizations in gated communities need tools that help them defend residents and prosecute criminals. Controlling access at gates was a simpler task in years long past. Today anyone believing that the Coachella Valley is still a sleepy resort area that is immune from crimes against persons and property should review the monthly statistics of local law enforcement.

The best security personnel, offering their most valiant efforts, are still limited by the quality and effectiveness of the technology and security infrastructure provided to them by the homeowners association. The harsh reality of this is that the security function must be elevated to a higher position in the budget review process. This in no way should mean just throwing money at a problem. It does mean that never before has so much value, useful technology and increased efficiency been available to defend gated communities.

Gates, staffed or not, are a required control point that usually include an access control system using wireless transponders or transmitters to operate the gate itself. If designed properly, this can provide an audit trail of entries and exits on a computer at the security office. But with service people, gardeners and guests entering, the reality of knowing who is on the property, and why, often becomes much more cloudy. Another unknown is the perimeter fence line that can present easy access by intruders, primarily to individual residences.

Cameras, already used by many communities at gates, usually record through video processors, onto a VCR tape. However, any security or law enforcement person who has sat for hours reviewing videotape to discover a questionable entry will tell you how arduous and often fruitless this process can be. There is an erroneous perception that a single camera for the entry gate and a single camera for the exit gate will provide enough detail to retrieve a license plate number, a vehicle description and a view of the driver. This is an expectation (or illusion) created by the need to fit camera system purchases into minimal budgets, or by security camera suppliers who want to take the sale at the expense of the security goals for the gated community. The reality is that the physics of video cameras, optics and VCR recording capabilities prohibit these three views from one camera.

At least two cameras per entry and exit are required to view the license plate, vehicle and driver. Camera positioning, lighting and sun angles are also critical factors. New video cameras, designed to capture license plate numbers in any weather, day or night, are available. They come at a price but they guaranty results. High-resolution day/night video cameras are now available that increase the detection of details no matter what the time of the event. And the real capper to efficient use of gate camera systems is Digital Recording.

Digital recording, after some years of evolution, is finally coming of age. With these devices, gone is the arduous search process of VCR tape. Gone is the costly wear and maintenance of time-lapse VCR machines. Gone are the degraded images from old or worn tapes. Gone are the daily tape changes and cabinets of archived videotape. No, digital recorders aren't cheap either, but their search efficiency, low maintenance, excellent image quality and virtually unlimited expansion of image storage capacity more than justifies the expense. Here too though there are caveats. There are now more than 200 digital recorder brands on the market, all saying their product is the best thing since sliced bread. Many have no right to make that claim. You must

seek expert advice from a security systems provider with much knowledge in this area. If you don't, you will have unnecessary frustration and expense.

To really provide exceptional capability for security surveillance, consider adding one or more well-placed pan-tilt-zoom cameras in elevated strategic locations on the property (on buildings or light poles). These cameras can be pointed and zoomed in to identify and record problem events, intruders and vehicles within the boundaries of the property. These devices, that may be located away from the security command office or gate, may require considerable cable routing, conduit and trenching to get camera signals and power to and from the cameras. This will especially be the case in older properties where CCTV cameras and other extensive security measures were never anticipated by the developer. But one caution: if someone advises the use of wireless video, think twice. Wireless interference is so great in some areas, and will only increase with more population, development and frequency usage, that your investment in wireless video will be eventually lost. Exceptions to this are narrow beam microwave and laser transmission systems.

Perimeter detection systems work on fences and block walls and add the overall protection to thwart intruders that don't enter through the gates. While this can be a large expense, prices have come down in recent years and the peace of mind for homeowners might warrant such a cost. It provides your security staff and law enforcement with an alert and a location that they can respond to immediately. These might be sensor cables attached to fences or on the top of block walls. It may be microwave, infrared or beam sensors or a combination of these. The most amazing of these perimeter detection technologies, though very costly, is buried electromagnetic sensing cable. It is unseen, undetectable and excellent where appearance is important. This is used at many government facilities, embassies and high-end residences.

Finally, we return to our initial premise. If the security of residents and their property is important, it is the homeowners and their management who must empower the security staff with the tools that modern technology provides. Do this, and the word 'security' will take on a whole new meaning.

Ron Iamele is president of Premier Security, Inc., a member of CAI and the Resort Communities Security Associations. He can be reached at (760)323-7395 or (800)320-2527.