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Industry Insights

Effectively Working with Security Consultants

By Thor A. Mollung, Allegion Specification Manager

On a building project, the security consultant directly affects the door hardware decisions for every single opening in a facility—whether or not that's their intent.

That's why the relationship between the architect and the security consultant should begin early in a project to ensure there's alignment between the overall security plan and the nuts and bolts—literally—of how each opening is specified.

The role of a security consultant often varies from project to project. Generally, security consultants make recommendations on overall security system design. However, some focus their services on system integration—concept, design, procurement, installation and commissioning—while others provide a broader scope, making recommendations on how the security system itself fits into the owner's comprehensive security program.

Once a security consultant is engaged, architects should inquire about the specific role the consultant will play. Will the consultant focus on access control, burglar alarms and video only? Or will he or she also provide input on process, policies, procedures, risk management and crisis management? Is the focus system design, implementation—or both?

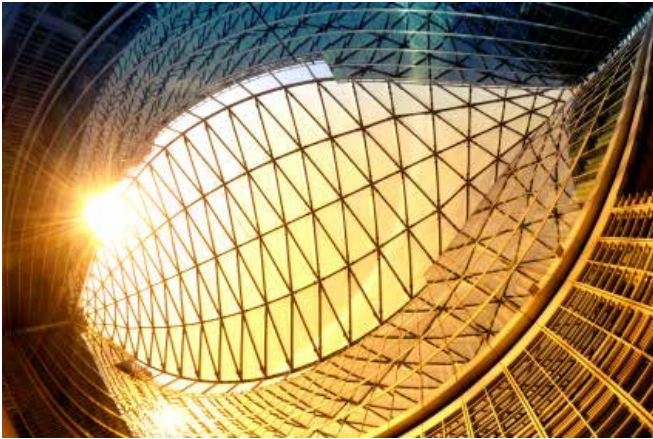
When the specific role of the security consultant is identified, you have a clearer understanding of how the security system and the mechanical/electrical hardware components contribute to the overall security program. In fact, problems often surface on projects where roles and intent are not fully understood. The security system being designed must coordinate with the mechanical and electromechanical hardware being specified on the project. These two things should occur in conjunction with one another. However, on projects where the security consultant and the architect are not working closely together, this can occur independently of one another—with an end result that is unsatisfactory to the owner and end user.

Likewise, the installation of door hardware and the integrated security solutions are separate, yet related, functions that need to be in alignment with one another. Planning for both should be coordinated. Yet, the opposite often occurs. Most architects have experienced this scenario: The hardware is specified, procured and installed by the contract hardware distributors or general contractor on the job. The electrical contractor pulls the cable to the door or opening, but the final terminations between the lock hardware and the security component (card reader, biometric reader, door contact and request to exit motion detector) have not been spelled out. And the general contractor and hardware installers both claim it was not within their scope of work.

By engaging the security consultant early on, you can avoid these scenarios and work together to coordinate a smooth process from the time the components are installed – to the time the systems are first powered.

Hardware Specification Consultant Invaluable Resource to Architects

To ensure coordination, there should be regular meetings with the architect, security consultant, owner representative and the hardware specification consultant. The importance of hardware specification consultants cannot be overstated. In fact, they are often an architect's best resource for interacting with a security consultant. Hardware specification consultants can ensure an opening meets all required, NFPA and ADA codes and make recommendations on hardware that is best suited for an opening.



For example, Allegion hardware consultants have worked with security consultants who commonly default to the use of electric strikes because they are inexpensive. While electric strikes are a great solution for some applications, they are not recommended for high-security applications. A hardware consultant can assist the architect, end user and security consultant with choosing the right hardware for each opening that is application-specific.

By involving a hardware specification consultant in meetings, architects can ensure that the hardware being specified properly fits the system design and intent. Additionally, hardware specification consultants can engage electronic access control (EAC) consultants for product demonstrations and guidance in coordinating electronic and mechanical solutions into the overall security system design.

Questions Architects Should Ask Security Consultants

- Who is the manufacturer of the security systems you are proposing?
- Have you worked on projects of similar size and scope? If so, what systems did you recommend on those jobs?
- What is the overall intent of the security systems being installed? How do you and the owner anticipate the system working?
- Is there a performance specification available that identifies:
 - The intent of the system
 - The system identified as the basis of design
 - Other systems identified as “equals” or “acceptable” for this project
 - The type of credential (smart card, mag stripe, proximity, key fob or biometrics)
- Are there plans to utilize a wired system or wireless system with regards to readers and locks? You don’t want to specify wireless locks and pair those locks with a system that does not fully utilize all of the features provided by wireless locks.
- Are there any special features that must be prevalent in the system?
- Does the owner require lockdown capabilities? If yes, how do you plan to interface with the locking hardware?
- What hardware manufacturer is being used or is favored?
- Does the owner have hardware and/or electronic security standards in place?

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