

The hardest job in security? Keeping a multi-site retailer secure.



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Being a security manager in a big, multi-site retail company is not for the faint hearted. Take any major multi-site UK retailer as an example and consider how complex their respective sites are. From a 24 hour megastore on the outskirts of a major city, right through to a small store on a village corner, these retailers also have to cope with the challenge of having a number of different *types* of facility all on one site; a warehouse or storeroom, a car park, a shop front, a staff area, sometimes even a petrol forecourt.

Make no mistake, retail environments are complex, and for this reason can be difficult to properly secure. However, emerging trends like cloud solutions, mobile apps and integrated security solutions are helping security managers to respond by facilitating the process of managing multiple staff, contractors and customers at the same time as managing costly theft and shrinkage from outside and within. By partnering with the right manufacturer, security managers are increasingly able to control the security of their sites quickly, efficiently, cost effectively and – crucially – comprehensively.

One major challenge for a security manager charged with overseeing the safety and security of people and assets for a multi-site retailer is access control for employees. With multiple staff – shelf stackers to senior managers – often moving from site to site, how do security managers ensure that the movement of people across the various parts of the business can happen smoothly and efficiently, without compromising site safety? Also, in an industry like retail - with high levels of seasonal labour and employee churn, it can be difficult for security managers to keep up with the rapid rise and fall of access requests.

In this context, integrated access control systems are quickly becoming the retail security manager's best friend. Solutions on the market today – in addition to software development kits like our own HSDK – allow the integration of an access control system with other systems like HR or payroll. This automatically updates access credentials based on changes to a staff member's employment status. In addition, by centrally managing all access control functionality, it ensures that, say, five members of staff redeployed from a quiet store to a busier one at Christmas time can instantly access the building in order to stock the shelves and ensure the shop is ready to serve its customers.

Another issue commonly faced by security personnel at multi-site retail companies is managing internal fraudulent activity. With so many staff on the shop floor, and many of them completing a range of different tasks at different times during the day in different buildings, it can be challenging to identify patterns of behaviour that might indicate foul play. This opens up loopholes for unscrupulous employees and, over time, can cost the retailer a significant amount of money in lost revenues.

Again, technology has come to the aid of the security manager here too. The integration of Point of Sale (POS) systems like tills and checkouts with video - and the use of logical security to identify staff in cash offices - is slowly eliminating this issue by tying suspicious activity to a specific employee, and allowing the on-site

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security managers to quickly investigate, identify and deal with the staff member in question as appropriate. In a fast-paced retail environment like a big supermarket or department store – with a high circulation of staff – these innovations have helped security managers to seriously clamp down on fraud.

A multi-site retailer also requires a range of different types of security system to suit different scenarios. For example, an access control system in staff areas, an intruder alarm in the warehouse, an automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) solution for the petrol forecourt, a video analytics solution for the car park, a full CCTV solution for the shop floor. Complicated, yes. But worse, what if the different systems don't talk to each other? Imagine the man hours wasted managing each solution separately or dealing with maintenance and repairs in a silo. No well-run business can afford to haemorrhage staff hours and cash.

Integration to the rescue. Working with trusted manufacturers – who are capable of providing a full range of products that integrate with each other – is allowing security managers in large retail sites to manage all of their systems through one central interface. One global system for multi-site security requirements makes perfect sense. It means one system to learn and operate, delivering savings in resources, training time, and system management. It also cuts the costs and inconvenience of dealing with multiple vendors for security needs, delivering a co-ordinated approach to maintenance, upgrades and overhauls, minimising business disruption.

The final concern faced by a security manager dealing with multiple retail sites is the fact that, until cloning becomes mainstream, we physically can't be in two places at once. It's not uncommon for a security manager to be faced with a range of different urgent 'asks' - grant access to an employee in a certain part of the facility, investigate an alarm in a warehouse and run an update on the access control system – all at the same time. In a high pressured, busy environment like retail, waiting an hour often just isn't an option.

Thankfully, technology enabling remote management of security systems has come on in leaps and bounds. Now it's possible for a security manager to complete tasks in multiple areas all from one place through a single-screen log-in. In addition, the growth of mobility – laptops, tablets, smartphones – means that, with best in class security systems, retail security managers are empowered to complete urgent tasks 'on-the-go', allowing them to operate at full capacity, and delivering significant savings in manpower resources.

In summary, retail is one of the toughest sectors for a security manager to operate in. Threats to site security come in many varied forms. A drive-off on the petrol forecourt. A theft from the confectionary stand. An employee with their fingers in the till. Each problem has an antidote, but often all of the dots don't join together. The potential for wasted hours, lost revenue, retail shrinkage and inefficient operations is huge. Nowhere are the benefits of integrated security solutions from a trusted manufacturer felt so keenly, and appreciated so much.