

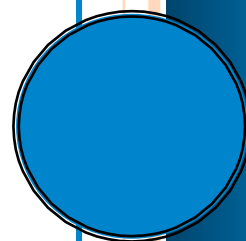
Cutting to the Chase

New developments are paving the way for the value-focused

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Wouldn't it be remarkable if cameras, access control systems and network monitoring software came with value statements that would allow CSOs to see at a glance what these products can really do for them?

Instead, security professionals are relegated to wading through overly technical product websites, shuffling across tradeshow floors to talk to marketing representatives and making endless phone calls to peers to find out what products work for them.

Several factors have conspired to make product decisions more difficult than ever, particularly the monumental growth and change in the industry in the last 10 years.

Market Growth Breeds Choice, Confusion One certainly can't complain about a lack of product choices in this industry. In fact, there are so many options in so many categories that it's nearly impossible to process it all.

The Security Industry Association's 2008 U.S. Security Market Report and Economic Impact Study found that the security market was a nearly \$10 billion industry in 2007, and supporting industries, including installers and integrators, accounted for an additional \$8.2 billion. SIA's membership has more than doubled since 1995, and its biggest tradeshow, ISC West, has been ranked No. 1 on Tradeshow Week's 50 Fastest-Growing Events list for seven years running. ASIS International also has experienced massive growth, increasing its membership by more than 12,000 since 1993.

This rapid market expansion has had some predictable results: more choices, faster innovation, fancier marketing and, often, more confusion among buyers and users of security technology and services. Stepping onto a tradeshow floor can feel like walking into organized chaos; it's overwhelming and hard to find what you're looking for if you don't already have a specific product or booth number in mind. Sometimes it's even difficult to tell what type of product or service is being sold because the marketing or technical language is too heavy or convoluted.

The Web helps individual buyers focus their product searches, but language presents a barrier. And while Web searches may turn up security companies you don't find on the show floor, it can be difficult to tell whether these businesses are legitimate. Another common problem, both online or on site, is that there is no standard for security product specification sheets, making basic comparisons between seemingly similar products difficult.

IT Elements The continued merging of IT companies and concepts into the traditional security space has further complicated purchasing decisions. If marketing language is a problem with traditional security products, it is even more so with products that incorporate information technology and networking elements.

In some cases, companies over-simplify these aspects of their products, making them sound like trouble-free cure-alls that the user can simply plug in and forget.

In other cases, the language becomes so technical it entirely obscures the product's purpose.

Yet, more security professionals are seeking information on exactly these types of offerings. ASIS International's most recent Exhibitor Prospectus states that 23 percent of its show attendees are looking for computer/Internet security and 35 percent for IP networking products.

It's becoming increasingly important that companies offering IT products and interoperable systems improve their communication with potential buyers.

A New Model Better communication about products would benefit both companies and users. Companies that are more attuned to the need for straightforward, solution-oriented marketing than their competitors should enjoy a distinct sales advantage. They also may see increased customer satisfaction and positive word of mouth.

Security professionals in general also would benefit because they would be able to make better educated decisions on product purchases, and they would likely also save time in the search for the right product. They would be more likely to find the product best suited to address the issues their

company has identified. What's more, solution-oriented marketing data would help security professionals explain the product's value to other key colleagues, including management, increasing the potential for funding.

Specifically, product manufacturers and service providers must take a closer look at what users want from them -- solutions, not widgets.

Solutions, Not Technologies One way security product and service companies can help their potential customers is to position themselves as problem solvers rather than simply technology providers. Senior managers and CSOs looking for security products and services want to know what problems the products or services purport to solve, whether they will provide return on investment or increase business value, and how to gain support and funding for these products from company management.

An increasing number of Security Executive Council community members have been asking other members and faculty for input on vendor recommendations or the best products and services for a given problem. There also has been an uptick of similar questions in the daily report on the search terms used on the organization's site. That means more site visitors are seeking answers, not just sources.

Should it really fall on the manufacturers' shoulders to answer these types of questions? What about the buyers' due diligence?

Security professionals can, and generally do, pursue peer-to-peer networking and other types of research to find answers on the applied value of products. But peer groups are only so wide, and the size of the industry makes it very difficult to ensure their peers' successes reflect the best solutions for their problems.

Even when security professionals feel they are doing their due diligence, they often fail to clearly articulate the problem that needs to be addressed, making it difficult to find the right product or service. Unless product and service providers speak the language of solutions, these problems will cause due diligence to be a challenge.

Even integrators get comfortable with two or three product lines or configurations and then begin to focus on selling those alone, rather than digging to find solutions that may be better suited for the individual

customer. Or they find a comfort zone in one particular industry or sector and fail to learn about solutions that can provide benefit outside of that narrow scope.

Part of the reason for this is the size of the market. With so many new products released every year, even integrators can't stay current. Also keep in mind that many of the thousands of small businesses out there that need security products and services can not afford to hire integrators who will do the value searching for them.

Progress, But Not Enough Many product providers -- particularly in the traditional security market -- have made progress in communicating value. Manufacturer websites now generally include case study sections, and many companies work with their customers to provide such case studies to industry magazines, to show potential customers what their product or service can do in the real world.

For a detailed description of the company's larger offerings; it's now the area in which testimonials and applications are showcased. ISC East changed its name and format this year to ISC Solutions, and SIA claims the re-imagined show will focus on the application of products introduced previously at ISC West.

However, in the majority of cases, the progress is still not enough. Often the value-oriented message companies provide is confined to specific portions of their marketing, rather than informing the whole of their company message. And even a manufacturer that is genuinely trying to answer security professionals' questions may not be able to provide them with all the information they need.

A case study can only go so far in outlining a solution's value. Because of mutual non-disclosure agreements with prior customers, companies generally cannot share the depth of information that would truly help security professionals sell a product or service to their own management.

A New Way Earlier this year, the Security Executive Council launched an initiative to ultimately provide this sort of information for the benefit of both security professionals and service providers.

The Security Executive Council's Solution Innovations initiative identifies products and services that differentiate themselves by demonstrating real business value.

Security-related product and service providers who apply for Solution Innovations Partner status undergo an in-depth diligence process to authenticate company integrity. They also work with the Solution Innovations team to articulate their value propositions in a compelling and meaningful way. Once they are approved, partners' product or service value claims become subject to detailed, ongoing examination and authentication.

Under the direction of Francis D'Addario, former vice president of Partner and Asset Protection for Starbucks Coffee, Solution Innovations intends to help both product/service providers and security professionals by clearing out the marketing and tech speak, improving the communication of problem/solution and business value, and narrowing product and service searches by identifying companies that are willing to put their claims up for independent corroboration.

"Many companies are saying their applications have great results," D'Addario said. "We're asking them to open up the kimono, so to speak. If you're making a claim, we have to authenticate the results."

If at any point in the process, a partner fails to demonstrate process integrity or true value in its claims, that partner is dropped from the program.

"We're just beginning the process of authentication, and we hope to have several new announcements in the coming months," D'Addario said.

The Future of the Industry Forward-thinking and business-focused practitioners need security products and services that provide genuine value. Companies must learn to articulate it, integrators must become solutions coordinators rather than technology distributors, and practitioners must continue their due diligence, researching, learning and sharing information with peers.

CSOs are business leaders first. The security companies that recognize that fact, and are changing to accommodate it, will lead the industry in the years to come.

Bob Hayes is the managing director of the Security Executive Council.

About the Security Executive Council

We are a research and advisory firm for security leaders. We have a collective of close to 100 security subject matter experts that have been successful security executives or are recognized industry experts in their field. The resources and tools we develop are constantly evolving to provide maximum value. Some engage with us by way of multi-year “retained” services agreements (Tier 1 Stakeholders). Tier 1 Stakeholders are those that want support on an ongoing basis but also want to have an active role in identifying solutions for the industry. Others come to us seeking a specific solution to a contained issue. In all the ways people engage with the SEC the bottom line goal is to help define and communicate the value of the Security organization.

Contact us at: contact@seclleader.com

Learn more about the SEC here: <https://www.securityexecutivecouncil.com>