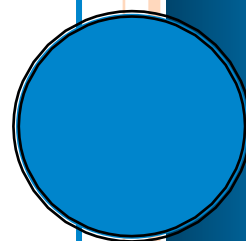


## ***Comcast Center Sets a New Standard***

Marleah Blades

Originally Published in SecurityInfoWatch

October 2008



## Comcast Center Sets a New Standard

The new Comcast Center skyscraper in Philadelphia has a lot to be proud of. It's the 14th-tallest building in the United States and the tallest skyscraper between New York and Chicago. Designed to achieve LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, it's the tallest LEED-registered building in the country. The towering all-glass building is state-of-the-art, featuring the latest advances in building construction and has changed Philadelphia's skyline. Its south wall reflects a shimmering portrait of One Liberty Place, the structure it surpassed to become the tallest building in Philadelphia. Comcast Center was built to be elegant, professional and inviting, both inside and out. When visitors enter the building, they walk into an expansive, open lobby and the soaring "Winter Garden," a 120-foot-high atrium marked by a Jonathan Borofsky sculpture entitled "Humanity in Motion," where life-sized figures are affixed to steel poles that criss-cross the lobby. Visitors are greeted cordially by ladies and gentlemen in matching sharp blue suits.

Tour guides? Salespeople? Not exactly. These are the building's security officers, and they have been carefully chosen and trained to help accomplish the mission of the two security executives in charge here: to provide excellent, seamless security along with excellent customer service.

### A Tenant-Owner Marriage

Comcast Center is owned by a joint venture of Liberty Property Trust, a leader in developing and managing high-performance green buildings, and CommerzLeasing und Immobilien AG. It sits atop a commuter rail station, and the underground concourse features an upscale food and shopping marketplace, while the ground floor includes a full-service restaurant and a seasonal cafe. More than 90 percent of the building is leased by Comcast. As the lead tenant, Comcast was able to work with Liberty during construction to develop the security plan for the building. Mark Farrell, chief security officer for Comcast, and Jim Birch, director of security and life safety for Liberty Property Trust, collaborated from the beginning to eliminate disconnects between Comcast and base building security.

“We decided that the best way to secure this building was a seamless approach both from a technology and security officer perspective,” Farrell says. “There is integration and communication between both groups, and that has created a smooth working environment. Sometimes there’s competition between officer forces in a building because they’re doing different things and have different priorities. In our situation, the relationship is more like a marriage.”

“It started with a shared vision of what we wanted to create here,” Birch adds.

### **Ambassadors for Security**

Not only were both tenant and owner looking for seamlessly integrated security, they both wanted to use customer service to make visiting Comcast Center an experience. “We did not want it to be just another office building; we wanted it to be a world-class destination, similar to Rockefeller Center in New York.” Birch and Farrell recognized that a focus on customer service would also work to enhance security.

“Both of us wanted to redefine security,” Birch says. “We emphasized that every time you smile at a person, every time you greet a person and say their name, every time you make it a positive visitor experience, you are welcoming them and building a relationship with them because you get to know them. There’s such a marriage between customer service and good security.” Birch noted that the relationship built through these interactions also lets visitors and employees know that the security staff recognizes them and is aware of their presence.

While Comcast and Liberty maintain separate officer forces contracted through Allied Barton, Birch and Farrell were determined to recruit and train the two groups together, to use a common uniform, and to maintain a consistent officer presence. In every aspect of force development, Birch says, “we emphasize customer service.”

“Rather than recruit in traditional places, we went to concierge associations and universities with schools of hospitality,” Birch continues. “When we put

ads in the paper, we didn't post them under 'security'; we posted them under 'customer service.' Our theory was that we can teach most people security, but we can't teach someone to be a nice person."

In addition to security training, first aid, CPR and AED training, officers get two levels of hospitality training, which is new to the industry, Farrell says. "We have a trainer from Disney and one from the Four Seasons," he says. "With this customer service approach, our officers are trained to interact with visitors in a friendly manner, but if they need to take the hospitality hat off and put the security hat on, they are prepared to do that."

Instead of traditional uniforms, both officer forces are outfitted in blue business suits from a high-end Philadelphia clothier. According to Birch, they don't look like security officers; they look like many of the businesspeople who travel through the building every day. Farrell says the customer service approach has helped elevate the officer forces to a new level, and there is very little turnover.

"With the same recruiting, the same training, and the same presence, both security staffs have adopted the same mantra of customer service in security," Birch says. "They operate as one officer force even though we have different geographic areas we cover in the building."

### **Seamless and State-of-the-Art**

Comcast Center's security technology follows the same customer-friendly, seamless philosophy. "Even though we have an adequate amount of CCTV through the building and sophisticated access control and visitor registration, it's not intrusive to our visitors," Birch says.

Comcast's and the base building's security systems are integrated. When Comcast adds or terminates employees, the system uploads changes from the HR database and makes the appropriate changes to the base building system that controls access through the lobby turnstiles. The system also enables Comcast to register visitors from its offices while updating that information at the main lobby desk, where visitors will go to be badged and escorted to the appropriate meeting place.

All door and turnstile access control is smart-card based on contactless HID iclass cards, which are used by the 2,900 employees and contractors for cashless purchases at the Comcast cafeteria and access to the parking garage as well as some laptops. “We tried to build enough technology into the card to use it for multiple purposes in the future,” Farrell says. Massachusetts-based integrator TouchCom integrated the building’s network video surveillance, with fully off-site storage to improve disaster recovery processes.

Life safety planning and training took on new importance in light of the Sept. 11 attacks. Says Farrell: “We wanted to ensure that there weren’t reservations for employees working high in the building, so we’ve educated them on the safety and security features in the building. This includes a floor captain program. On each floor we have three people assigned and trained in CPR and AEDs, they have an evacuation backpack, and they have been trained in building evacuation and shelter-in-place.” In addition, the evacuation stairways are one foot wider than code, which enables employees to be evacuated more quickly. Also, the sprinkler systems are entirely redundant.

Birch recommends a seamless, service-based approach to all security directors, both tenants and owners: “The old Jack Webb approach — just watch visitors and be stern and don’t interact — isn’t the only way; in fact, successful security is evolving to the exact opposite,” he says. “We have not yet had one report of theft or any reports of crime you’d expect in an office setting. You get to know your tenants on a personal basis to create a positive atmosphere.”

*Marleah Blades is former Senior Editor for the Security Executive Council, where her responsibilities included writing and editing member resources as well as articles and columns that share the expertise of council members. Prior to joining the Security Executive Council she served for six years as managing editor of Security Technology & Design magazine.*

## 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@seclader.com](mailto:contact@seclader.com)

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