

Keeping Assets Safe — Worldwide

Software platform simplifies security workforce needs

by PAUL VACHON

It's no secret that communication, collaboration and a healthy dose of well-deployed technology are essential for the health of any retail organization. Through productive dialogue with customers, competitors and consultants, a retailer can strive to continuously improve all aspects of its operations — be it merchandising, promotion, logistics or, perhaps most importantly, security.

Total store security is the primary concern for Guirchaume Abitbol, president and CEO of Trackforce, a cloud-based platform dedicated to managing the human resource side of retail security. By offering both his international perspective and his company's technical expertise, retailers in the United States can gain valuable insights.

There's a growing need in Europe to reduce security-related labor costs, Abitbol says. Two facts underscore this priority: First, store



locations in Europe are more numerous and occupy a smaller footprint than their American counterparts, which increases the need for proactive monitoring.

Second, European wages are considerably higher — almost double what security people make in the United States.

“The number of labor hours has to be reduced, but the same levels of efficiency and effectiveness need to be maintained,” Abitbol says. At the same time, security personnel are becoming increasingly responsible for things other than pure asset protection.

“Store security people in Europe are involved in safety-related issues, including checking emergency exits, maintaining fire extinguishers and other equipment, plus related duties not directly related to loss prevention. Therefore, the goal in Europe today is to reduce the hours of people in the field and increase their efficiency through technology.”

SCALABLE AND ADAPTABLE

Franprix, a chain of supermarkets with hundreds of small stores scattered throughout Paris, has state-of-the-art CCTV cameras at each store that are monitored elsewhere.

“It was too expensive to have an officer at every store, so we worked with the company to set up a 24/7 command center where the activity at each location is being monitored,” Abitbol says.

“When a security-related incident occurs, an officer is sent to the location by motorcycle.”

The command center uses Post, Trackforce’s signature application that “monitors, manages and automates a company’s total security operations in real time,” including geolocation of all security agents. By operating in real time, the command center can seamlessly sync with m-Post, the smartphone app used by personnel in the field.

Post offers other capabilities, such as maintaining human resources records for security staff. It’s also fully scalable, making it possible to monitor events in any number of store locations anywhere, even worldwide. Using the system in this manner increases its efficiency quotient.

“A supervisor can communicate over multiple channels to security officers at all locations they are responsible for,” Abitbol says. “This delivers savings for the merchant without compromising the quality of its security environment.”

While the technology is indeed powerful, it’s also highly adaptable. Abitbol says that since the situation in the United States is somewhat varied, a more flexible approach is needed. “In America, you’ll have places with only a security person posted at the door, or others with sophisticated artificial intelligence and facial recognition software. It’s pretty inconsistent.”

This may be due to differences in the physical landscape. While most places in Europe have numerous small shops clustered in highly urban environments, the U.S. retail landscape still largely consists of malls, both strip and enclosed.

To accommodate for this difference, Trackforce offers another product called Patrol specifically tailored to assist security staffers while “on tour.” Besides being the primary way of dispatching officers when needed, the tool also enables them to file reports remotely, use step-by-step guides to help with specific tasks and summon help in emergency situations. It also features a real-time dashboard so managers can monitor each officer’s activity.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS

Trackforce’s flexibility enables it to be equally adaptable across a wide range of industries beyond retail, including direct providers of security services and concerns in the health care, property management and other industries. Even the U.S. State Department has utilized Trackforce to enhance security at its embassy in Mexico City.

One example is Inter-Con Security, a comprehensive provider of protective services based in Pasadena, Calif., which serves clients in multiple industries including retail. Prior to its adoption of Trackforce, Inter-Con used a legacy guard tour system incapable of capturing videos or still images or communicating in real time.

After transitioning to Trackforce’s system, including equipping its staff with m-Post, the company says it has been able to simplify daily guard tasks while improving incident and hazardous activity response rates with Trackforce’s security management platform.

Since Inter-Con introduced the system into its Mexican operations in January of 2015, its clients have seen a decline in events such as vandalism, assaults and thefts.

Trackforce’s Post and Patrol applications also offer analytic functions, which allow clients to access archived data, brainstorm and strategize ways to further minimize risk. Use of analytics is common in the United States, but according to Abitbol, how it’s done is perhaps where store security especially lags behind Europe.

“In America a lot of data is collected from various software platforms and directly from security personnel, who come in contact with employees and customers. This also happens in Europe, but in that case, analysis and reporting are more streamlined. European retailers have a consistent method of working, and are able to accurately measure how they are performing relative to security and safety, benchmark different stores and regions, and do analysis needed to make data-driven decisions.”

He points out that data-driven decision making is currently done in the United States, but that the information used to arrive at the decisions comes almost exclusively from automated systems, and not from people — an important distinction.

“Working with data derived from both sources is both more efficient and effective,” Abitbol says.

In fact, he sees this integration as the next horizon in retail security. “You can put in as much technology as you want, but at some point, pairing humans with the technology will emerge as the best way to go. The overall effort needs to be driven by humans.” **STORES**

Detroit-based Paul Vachon writes for various trade publications, in addition to feature stories for consumer magazines and books on Michigan history and travel.