

TAKING THE FEAR OUT OF WIRELESS

The technical limitations that hampered the uptake of wireless intruder alarm and access control systems have been overcome. Security is ready to go fully wireless, with all the benefits that brings.



Peter O'Connor, Managing Director, Global Security Devices (GSD)

The relentless growth of wireless technology within our homes and workplaces has been one of the defining features of the past decade. Mobile phones, Wi-Fi hotspots, Wii consoles and wireless entertainment systems have joined more established examples such as TV remotes and cordless phones. The world – our world – is going wireless.

But there is one area that wireless technology has colonised with only limited success, and that is home and business security. Despite the fact that wires add complexity and cost, despite the fact that wires are obtrusive and messy, installers persist with legacy wired technology and have resisted the move towards wireless intruder alarm and access control systems.

Wireless benefits

On the face of it, wireless should be a no-brainer.

For a start, wireless systems are quicker to install. This is

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good for the installing team because it means it can quickly move on to the next job and good for the customer because there is less inconvenience and interruption.

Other benefits? No painting or refurbishment costs for customers,

post-install. Greater flexibility as to where the system can be sited. And, last but not least, if you move house or premises, or you are looking to secure something temporarily, such as a building site, you can take a wireless system with you afterwards and install it somewhere else. You certainly can't do that with a wired system.

So why are installers so set against wireless?

The answer is they are not. "You know, I'd love a good wireless system" is a comment I've often heard installers make.

Then maybe it's the customers that are the problem – they don't like wireless. But the fact that Eircom PhoneWatch has managed to amass 100,000 customers suggests just the opposite: a market for wireless security systems clearly exists, both on the residential side and, increasingly, in the commercial marketplace.

Poor performance

So if wireless isn't the problem, what is?

The problem has to do with the technology itself. The fact is that the standard of wireless products currently in the marketplace means they have not been able to compete with regard to certain installations and have therefore been ruled out in favour of wired systems.



This is particularly true of the challenging commercial and industrial sector, where performance, reliability and manageability are prerequisites.

There are several sides to the problem. The short battery life issue, for instance, which means customers have to replace batteries more often than they would like. The systems are often less robust than their wired counterparts and so break down more frequently. And when they do, it is often difficult to find the source of the problem. This is basically because the sensors work in 'shout-and-pray' fashion; problems may occur and a sensor send a signal but the panels may ignore it. This lack of reliable two-way communication between sensor and panel makes it difficult to check whether a sensor is working properly and to rectify problems at first attempt. The end result: mounting costs and frustrated installers.

The limited range of wireless systems is another bugbear: wire-free systems, as they currently exist, struggle to cover larger premises effectively. So when it comes to commercial premises of any size, 'wired' is always the default option.

All of this has resulted in a fear factor evolving around wireless technology. Installers will legitimately question the point of installing a system in a day if they have to spend three days trying to diagnose a fault at a later stage.

It boils down to trust. Saving money and time is one thing but unless an installer is happy with the kit he's working with, no amount of time or money saved is going to convince him to switch to wireless.

This is a pity because, as we've seen, wireless has so many benefits.

New dawn for wireless

When I founded Global Security Devices in January 2006 I was

determined to change installers' minds about wireless security systems. I wanted to provide a system that had all the ruggedness, reliability and performance of a wired system but which would be very quick and cost effective to install.

We assembled a team of industry professionals who between them had over 80 years' experience in the sector and who understood the market needs in terms of technical performance, cost and service levels.

Working to the exacting standards required by the commercial and industrial market, we set about developing a wire-free access control solution that would be capable of transferring data around the building without the expense of a wired network. And of course, being wireless, security considerations were top of mind. The technology we decided to use was based on the Zigbee IEE 802.15.4 standard with 32-bit to 128-bit AES encryption. This allowed us to develop a secure network on the 2.4Ghz unlicensed bandwidth.

World first

GSD have now brought the same technology to intruder alarms. At ISEC 2009, GSD will unveil the first Grade 3 wireless intruder alarm system in the world.

The system can secure up to 640 zones even more effectively than a wired system by enabling devices to be put in their optimum positions. Featuring full two-way communication between sensor and control panel, the panel contains a diagnostic toolkit which can instantly pinpoint any fault or anomaly. The toolkit makes life very easy for the installer when servicing the system, either on site or remotely.

The system is tough and resilient, too, and because it is made here in Ireland, there is full local support for the

product. Battery life, too, is an order of magnitude better than previous-generation wireless systems.

All of these innovations, we believe, will take the fear factor out of wireless intruder alarms for installers.

But that's not all. Integration is the buzzword in the security market and integrated products, sold or installed as part of a network, are now what customers are looking for: they want one system that does everything. So we have designed our systems with integration in mind - the access control key-pad and the intruder alarm controller can sit on the same network. This allows users to turn off the alarm

and gain access using the same key-pad. In short, our wireless access control and intruder alarms can work as a single system, something that has not been possible, until now - another first for GSD.

These innovations in wireless technology come at a time when Ireland is facing a new crime wave fuelled by the recession. The

latest Burglary Report from Eircom PhoneWatch shows that burglaries were up a staggering 32pc between June 2007 and June 2008. Over the coming months, householders and business owners will be making renewed efforts to protect their possessions - and will be investing in security technology to help them achieve that.

So, against this backdrop, my message to security installers is this: your reservations about wire-free systems may have been well founded - but not any more, thanks to GSD's new generation of high-performance wireless access and intruder alarm systems.

The time has come to make the change and find out what wireless security can do for you.

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