



# CHECKING IN TO HOTEL SECURITY

Thinking about a long-term stay in the hospitality vertical? We welcome integration guests to the budgetary concerns, technology opportunities, cabling challenges and other requests to meet being this market's technology concierge.

**By Erin Harrington**

**HOTELS ARE** one of the most challenging vertical markets to secure and safeguard, but also one of the most lucrative. Establishing a relationship with a national or international chain could potentially anchor a security integrator's business for years to come.

Here we check in on the demands and requirements of this sector, and glean some advice from both the integrator and manufacturer sides regarding what's needed to meet them. A sidebar takes a look at a particularly demanding subset of the hospitality industry, the casino market, and what's required to score some potentially big paydays.

## Property Size, Aesthetics Play Role

Surveillance Systems Inc. (SSI), a specialist in the design and installation of networked video, has been serving the hotel/hospitality sector since the firm's

inception in 2002. Todd Flowers, president of the Rocklin, Calif.-based company, has amassed a client roster that boasts some of the world's most renowned names in hospitality — from the Hilton Grand to the Four Seasons, the Wynn to the Hyatt Regency, Polar Towers to Caesar's Palace. And while it's proven a most lucrative line of business for SSI, Flowers notes that the technology solutions and applications that are most requested are almost always also driven by budgets.

"Often it depends on the size and how nice of a property it is," he says. Smaller hotels, in particular, usually want the most bang for their security budget bucks. Some of the grander-scale properties SSI

(Above) Video surveillance and analytics are in high demand with hotel customers, but security providers should make sure to simplify video management and interfaces for users.

## VERTICAL MARKETS: HOPPING INTO HOSPITALITY SECURITY

works with, however, like Four Seasons and Polar Towers, are also a timeshare/hotel combo or an owner/hotel combo, so they present different opportunities and requests for higher end technologies.

“They’re always looking for high res IP video in the lobby and valet areas,” Flowers notes. “There are often very nice cars coming through, so they want a solid check of the vehicles. However, for aesthetic reasons, they also don’t want to have too many cameras around.”

Video analytics is a hot commodity in hotel security these days, Flowers notes, explaining that providing analytics for people counting in the lobby and LPR (license plate recognition) in the valet area is becoming more desired. The areas of a hotel property that he believes are most vulnerable to security issues are anywhere there’s an entrance or exit.

“A lot of times these properties will have multiple access points,” he says, “so they will always have a camera in the lobby and, for nicer properties, in the valet, the elevators and the elevator waiting areas on every floor. And, depending on the budget, they’ll cover the hallways, too.”

### Overcoming Obstacles of Wire Work

While everyone would love to do business with clients like Hilton or Four Seasons, Flowers says it’s very competitive

and the budgets are usually very tight. He reiterates that they want to stretch them as much as possible, and finds that some of the issues on the installation side are not as straightforward as working in an office complex, for instance.

“In an office, you have an open ceiling, so it’s easy to pull wire,” he explains. “But, it’s hard in a hotel because it’s multistory. There’s limited space between the ceiling and floor above you and it’s typically not accessible.” Oftentimes, this means having to cut into the sheetrock and run cable in a 12-inch area. This requires painting and patchwork and can get expensive.

“When we’re lucky enough to be working on an original construction where everything is open, it’s easy to run cable. And, many times they want to add cameras in an older property, so an integrator needs to understand how to use the existing cable,” Flowers says. “It’s old cable vs. coax cable and if there’s a lot of it there, will you be able to use that coax and still run IP video over it? Sometimes you can, but you run into issues with where your access points are.”

A crucial component to keeping a job like this profitable, Flowers cautions, is making sure you have a very experienced person estimating and quoting the project. Otherwise, lost time like this can be a real risk to the integrator.

### Importance of Being True Integration Partner

Sometimes keeping the complex simple is the smartest way to go. Matthew Mrowczynski, V.P. Global Hospitality for Salto Systems, has been working with access control and electronic locking systems within the hospitality industry since 1993. He joined Salto, an access control system provider that maintains a Salto Hospitality division among its portfolio, in 2010 and notes that hospitality market end users are realizing there are now a lot of system integration supplier partners and interoperability needs to meet.

“Hotel guests now want to be able to communicate and use their keys for their charges, and their check-in, and energy management systems, and they want to have it all tied into a network communication,” Mrowczynski says. “So for full-service hotels, it’s now all about the integration with other products. It makes things a lot more efficient and productive to have a seamless integration.

“We’re at a point where if you don’t have a product that integrators with other systems on the property can work with, you’re missing the boat. Technology is so important, and now that the IT directors and CIOs have become very involved as players in this, it’s no longer a simple lock. It’s a system. If a hotel door lock isn’t an access control system, you’re going to miss out.”

Flowers adds that since the cost of video and storage have come down so much, it’s likely someone won’t be watching the video at a hotel all the time. Incidents are typically reviewed post-event, so megapixel quality is definitely preferred. It’s also typical, he says, that customers’ security directors are not experts when it comes to video surveillance, so the system needs to be simple to operate.

“We always offer something with an easy interface they can use to watch the video,” Flowers says. “It has to be easy to use, review, and offload for law enforcement. Using a digital zoom, a simple interface and high res video does the trick no problem.”

**Technologies Communicating Together**  
Security and associated technologies are huge issues for hotels to stay current on,

### Tips to Get in the Casino Game

If you’re planning on adding casinos to your hospitality portfolio, you’ll need to also add some certifications. To play to win in the gaming arena, you need to be well acquainted with the gaming environment and the requirements dictated by the federal authorities.

For integrators looking to do work in Native American gaming casinos operating on Indian reservations or other tribal lands in the United States, there are also regulations put forth by the National Indian Gaming Commission (NIGC). In casino environments, it’s an essential part of the integrator’s job to keep customers in compliance and their systems up and running.

Todd Flowers, president of California-based integrator Surveillance Systems Inc., recommends working with manufacturers that produce enterprise-level products and earning their certifications for selling, installing and servicing them. Casinos are mission-critical environments, he cautions, and project managers need to have a thorough understanding of the gaming market and meet the manufacturer requirements needed to survive in that high-stakes world.

Certifications not only must be maintained, but also upgraded over time, especially as technologies evolve. Different levels of certification are required at the installation level, another for the project manager and another for the network and sales professionals, Flowers notes.

Mrowczynski says. While some of the smaller group hotels always looked at locks as a commodity, say for an in-room safe or minibar, even those minor technologies have changed in recent years and may need to be addressed. For integrating technologies ZigBee used to be the wireless buzzword, but of late there seems to be an expanding use of Bluetooth, he says. Users want wireless communications, Mrowczynski suggests, and they want to know who's opening any given door or lock.

"Technology and security are very much tied together. In terms of video surveillance, it's a matter of sharing your software development kits [SDKs]," he notes. "For a hospitality project, we know Salto isn't going to be doing the entire hotel install. So, as a manufacturer, we can't limit the systems we tie into. We have to be able to share our software with all the other integrators and be very versatile in our communications and adoption."

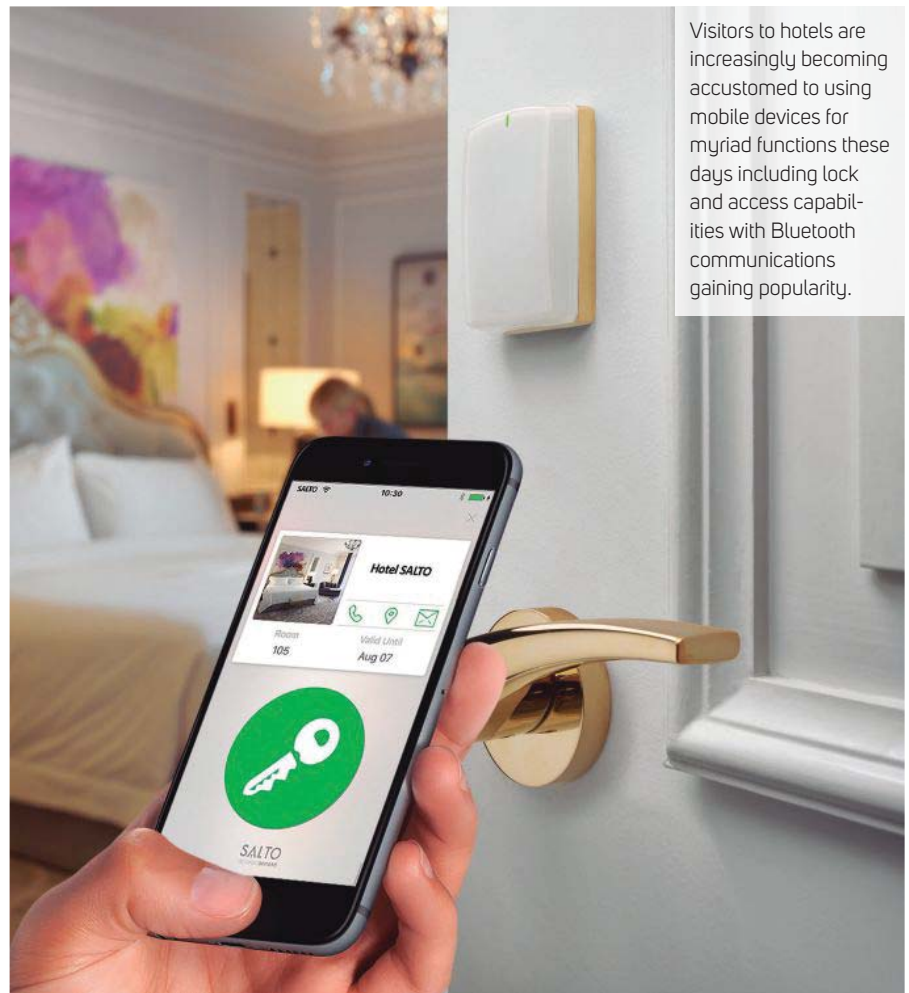
Regardless of which manufacturers' products security integrators specify, Flowers emphasizes the importance of manufacturer training. He advises that you need to understand a product's technical capabilities, and make sure that your estimators, engineers and installers are all trained and certified on what you're selling. He cautions that, when responding to a bid for a hotel project, if you have little or no experience with the products being specified, you will be at a disadvantage among the competition or technically in over your head.

"It's key to have strong relationships with your manufacturer partners," he says. "We all want that big sale, but chasing something you have no experience in can be very dangerous."

### Getting Started, Getting Paid

So how can an integrator who has never done a hotel install earn the trust of a decision maker and win a job? Flowers points out that there's typically a proposal process and advises that, as with any market, they should start out simple and seek out hotels and motels in their geographic region.

"If they start local and start small, they can grow into the market and steer clear



Visitors to hotels are increasingly becoming accustomed to using mobile devices for myriad functions these days including lock and access capabilities with Bluetooth communications gaining popularity.

PHOTO COURTESY SALTO SYSTEMS

of a situation they can't handle," he says. "There's nothing better than experience and unfortunately, many times the experience we gain comes at a cost. Don't rush into anything. Take time to understand the project, the pain points for the owner, and their budget."

That trust can be established by educating the customers on the changing technologies and what features are available in today's surveillance camera and access control offerings, for example. Keep in mind budget, but also those potential installation pitfalls that can impact your own bottom line.

"Many times people don't have a good grasp of the reality of the products. Manage the customer's expectations and, if they want cameras in the parking lot or garage, make sure there's power or cable. It's really smart to start small and grow into it, so you don't get into a situation that can be devastating or expensive to your company," Flowers says.

It's good to know what to expect with the billing process in the hospitality sector, too, which can vary between retrofit and new construction work. This often depends, Flowers says, on whether you're working for the owner or a general contractor. New construction means everything is progress building, which could slow down cash flow with a general contractor, he says. Owners tend to be more flexible with start-up costs to cover getting your guys onsite and purchasing products.

"If your milestone payments are accurate and you meet your timeline, you're going to be OK," he says. Beyond that, you should also explore opportunities for RMR — these can sometimes be found in selling video monitoring services, for instance, if there's no security team at the hotel or motel at night, he adds. **SSI**

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