

SECURITY SYSTEMS NEWS

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The other side

False alarms fees

How one company has made them its business

By Leischen Stelter, associate editor

WALDORF, Md.—The growth of false alarm ordinances in cities and counties has increased throughout the country in recent years. One company, appropriately naming its false alarm service Crywolf, has built its business around helping municipalities manage the enormous task of enforcing these false alarm policies.

AOT Public Safety Corporation, which owns and operates Crywolf software and technology, works with more than 140 cities and counties throughout the United States and Canada to provide management tools for the enforcement of false alarm ordinances, said the company's chief executive officer, Les Greenberg.

Begun in 1999, the company developed a patented proprietary software interface that pulls information directly from the municipalities' CAD 911 systems and imports it into its own system.

AOT offers cities and counties two options to manage their false alarm ordinances. Municipalities can either choose to administer their own false alarm program by utilizing Crywolf's management software to notify, track and bill alarm users who violate the ordinance, or they can choose to completely outsource the administrative duties to Crywolf.

"If we're outsourcing and performing [false alarm administration] as a service, we receive false alarm information from the CAD 911 system and then we do everything in terms of notifying alarm users that they've had a false alarm and, depending on which number false alarm it is and the ordinance details, we will bill the end users the appropriate fees and fines and collect the money," said Greenberg. In this case,

the company takes a percentage of the fines collected and "requires no upfront investment" by the municipality, said Greenberg.

While the majority of municipalities choose to manage their own false alarm programs, Greenberg said the company has experienced significant growth recently in the number of cities and counties choosing to outsource false alarm management responsibilities.

The City of Spokane, Wash., has used Crywolf as its third-party false alarm administrator since the inception of its false alarm policy in 2005, said Lieutenant Glenn Winkey, a Spokane Police Department false alarm reduction administrator. "Our false alarm ordinance went into effect in November of 2005, but we actually started enforcing it in May of 2006," said Lt. Winkey. "Crywolf does everything for us except alarm appeals.

"Our program is designed so that alarm companies are required to report their customer lists to us," said Lt. Winkey. Crywolf takes care of integrating alarm customer information into its system and administering the billing and collection services for the Spokane.

For self-managed cities, such as Buffalo, N.Y., AOT installed its Crywolf software and technology to help the city manage and enforce its false alarm ordinance. Judy Doyle, who works for the Buffalo's licensing department and false alarm reduction unit, said that "Crywolf technology helps keep track of accounts and how many false alarms are out there ... The system downloads the false alarm information from the police department into the Crywolf system and then we send out alarm fees accordingly."

The City of Buffalo requires alarm companies to register their customers and can

fine alarm companies that don't register their customers, she said.

Donna Speranza, general manager of the emergency response center for Doyle Security Systems, a security company in Rochester, N.Y., said the company monitors about 3,000 alarm accounts in Buffalo. She said that Doyle Security has had a good working relationship with the Buffalo licensing department and the exchange of false alarm information has become fairly routine.

"After we dispatch an alarm, Buffalo [licensing department] will give us a call back and let us know if it was an actual," said Speranza. "If it wasn't, the city sends us a bill and we bill our customer."

What isn't mentioned in that interaction is Crywolf's role. Often, Greenberg said, his company is transparent to the alarm community. Recently, the company has begun offering a Web-based service that allows alarm companies to view false alarm information so they can access "information on false alarm performance or false alarm issues in regards to their own customers with the intent of helping them self-manage this whole process," he said.

In general, Greenberg said his company has had good experiences working with alarm companies. "In recent years, alarm companies have recognized, from what I can tell, that it's in their best interest to reduce false alarms, so we get a lot of cooperation," he said. "Since we have so much information about false alarms and different requirements of different cities and counties' ordinances around the country, I think there's an opportunity for us to work with alarm industry groups to provide them better data in which to tackle the problem of false alarms." **SSN**