Searching for a Solution

Church Opens Its Doors To The Community

Churches have always served as centers of community activity. Today that's more true then ever. Many places of worship now provide child and elder care, sports ministries, counseling, continuing education, and other civic and social services.

But as church doors are increasingly open throughout the day and evening, every day of the week, they face the problem of how to secure their facilities. That was the problem faced by North Ridge Community Church, a four-building campus in Cave Creek, AZ. Church leaders wanted to open their doors to the community, but also needed the safety and protection provided by an effective security system.

They assumed that they would have to settle for some compromise that would force them to limit the access to their facility in order to achieve the necessary security. Instead, they found the perfect solution in a versatile alarm panel. It gave them the flexibility to selectively protect areas of the church, and enable authorized church members and guests to freely access specified rooms.

Open Access With Security

"North Ridge Community Church had a system in place, but it wasn't doing an effective job," according to Bob Dewhirst, President and owner of Counter Intrusion Applications in Cave Creek, AZ. It was configured so that the entire campus had to be armed or disarmed at once. So even though a group might only need to use one room in one building, all rooms in all four buildings had to be left unprotected. Their system just gave them no flexibility to accommodate outside groups who wanted to use individual meeting rooms."

David Sharp, Southwest Regional Sales Manager for Digital Monitoring Products says that he had an overriding goal as he worked with Dewhirst to select and configure a solution. "We wanted to mold the system around the needs of the people rather than the other way around. We wanted to provide them with transparent protection."

But achieving transparency is difficult in situations where a constantly changing list of individuals have to be credentialed

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and trained to use an alarm system. As with other high-turnover applications like retail and fast food, the church has a steady stream of new employees who must be educated on how to correctly arm and disarm their security system.

"Many of the people using their facilities for meetings or activities were completely unfamiliar with alarm systems," Dewhirst explains. "The problem was compounded by the fact that they might only interact with the system once a week or month, and were likely to forget codes or how to use the system. With the church's old system, users made a lot of mistakes. That resulted in so many false alarms at the church that there was a 'Do Not Dispatch' order on the facility."

Flexible Protection

Beginning in August 2007, Dewhirst's installers began the project. All moveable doors and windows were equipped with contact switches. Interior spaces were protected with motion detection. Doors to selected rooms were equipped with electric door strikes.

Success Story

At least one entrance on each of the three outlying buildings and seven doors in the main building were equipped with access control capability using a keypad with integrated proximity reader. The heart of the system was a DMP XR500NL-G network-version control panel.

"There were other commercial systems that offered similar access control functions," Dewhirst says. "But the DMP panel offered so many features that it was clearly above the other equipment available."

The facility was organized into a total of nine separate protected areas. With the equipment and software in place, church leaders could now better control access to the facility by users. When group leaders request the use of a meeting room at the church, the facility manager gives them a fob for access control. Using DMP System Link™ software to create door schedules, the fob holder is given credentials providing access only to specific areas in the church, only for specific days and times, and only until a specific date. Users don't need to remember any codes.

Like many buildings in the southwest, the classrooms, meeting and bathrooms all open to the outside, rather than to a central interior hallway. In addition to granting access to their meeting or classroom, the credentials automatically provide access to the nearest bathroom.

In some areas of the main building, motion detector coverage overlapped. Using the XR500's "Common Area" function, these areas were configured so that someone authorized to be in one area of the building wouldn't trip an alarm if they ventured into the adjacent area.

Surprisingly Simple

The system offers many features and options, but using the XR500N it could still be configured for extreme simplicity. "We made things as easy as possible for everyone to use," says Dewhirst. After presenting their fob to a reader, facility managers have the option to disarm the entire system for church-wide events. If they choose not to disarm the entire facility, then they have the option to selectively disarm any of the nine protected areas.

Authorized guests just need to present their fob near the keypad reader to gain access to their assigned meeting or classroom. While facility users have no trouble remembering how to disarm the system and enter the facility, they often forget to arm the system on their way out. Dewhirst says that to solve the problem, "We configured

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the system to autoarm at a set time each night. That way the church leaders knew that their facility would be protected every night."

System Link™ is so easy to use, church leaders have no trouble managing the credentialing process, and don't have to rely on their security provider to update, add, or delete users. The system relies on fobs so there's seldom a need to rekey any doors.

Through the DMP Advanced Reporting Module for System Link™, church managers can easily review reports that include each arm/disarm and access event by date, user, area, or access door.

Helping to Create a Community Center

"In most facilities, the more people who require access, the more complex it becomes to provide protection," says Sharp. "Just one or two people coming and going is not problem. With North Ridge Community Church, they wanted to give access to dozens of people. Counter Intrusion Applications took advantage of the XR500's many features to provide a flexible, easy to use system that opens the church to the community, but still provides the protection they need."

Dewhirst says that the installation and startup was almost totally trouble free. Church members and community leaders now have a simple-to-use keyless system to access meeting and classrooms. Church leaders have the open facility they wanted with the control they needed. The security solution created by Counter Intrusion Applications, built around the DMP XR500 panel has helped North Ridge Community Church be a true center for its community.

Equipment List
- DMP XR500NL-G network version control panel
- System Link™ software and Add-on Advanced Reporting Module
- Dual technology microwave/infrared motion detectors
- Keypads with integrated proximity readers
- Electric door strikes
- Door and window magnetic contacts
- Zone expanders

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