

Recent Crimewave Targeting Businesses Prompts Advice from Local Security Firms

by DANIEL PEARSON CBN Contributing Editor

Security Pros President and Chief Executive Officer Brian Shawver says criminal activity everywhere tends to increase during the summer months, mainly because more businesses are leaving doors and windows open during the day, and employees often forget to lock everything up tight at the close of business, but it seems that there has been more criminal activity than usual, especially to Central Oregon companies, in recent months.

A number of high-profile burglaries and break-ins to local businesses and organizations during the past few weeks resulted in increased calls to local security companies from business owners who are trying to learn how they can increase security on their premises and deter criminals from targeting their shops.

"I don't know if the downturn in the economy is directly related to an increase in crime, but we're definitely seeing an increase in the number of calls we receive," Shawver says. "Things have been starting to pick up a little for us."

Recent press releases issued by Central Oregon law enforcement agencies include details of an armed robbery at Corey's Bar and Grill in downtown Bend, a burglary of the Prineville Elks Lodge, and break-ins to two Forest Service pickup trucks, as well as a huge counterfeit money scheme halted by Bend police; although the latter can't be deterred by security measures it arguably demonstrates that the severity of business-related crimes has intensified in 2009.

Shawver said there is one simple step business owners can take to help keep criminals from targeting their company or location.

"The key thing is awareness," Shawver said. "I can take a look at building and do a quick evaluation of its weak points, and with that in mind we are working on a security makeover program where we come in and do a quick evaluation of a business to find its security weak spots."

Jim Bull, owner of Redmond-based Central Oregon Security and Sound, said keeping one's business free from break-ins starts with security basics, like purchasing better hardware, meaning deadbolts and locks.

"Especially if you are running a business that is located in like a strip mall or shopping center," Bull said. "In many cases, and this is especially true in subdivisions where new homes are going up, the developer will put the same hardware on each door and give you the

keys but you have no idea how many keys are out there. There could be several subcontractors with keys to several houses in a new development."

Shawver and Bull agreed that it's also important for business owners to be aware of areas in and around their

over and gain access to the premises with the code I give them, and I can change that code at any time," he said. "This keeps down the number of people running around town with a key to your front door in their pocket."

Riding the wave of increased demand

economy bottomed out during fourth quarter 2008.

"They needed an inexpensive solution that allowed them to monitor the status of these foreclosed homes," Authier said. "We worked with our internal software developers to harness the benefits of IT network cameras to provide an inexpensive, convenient solution to our corporate banking customers. From there, our (online camera) services have grown into applications not just for commercial customers but for residential consumers who want to keep an eye on things, and to small businesses that want to see people coming into their foyer if no one is stationed at the front desk, or auto dealerships that can't be at every point in the sales lot and are losing business because they are not aware when a customer steps onto the property."

Shawver said it's easy for business owners to take a "it won't happen to me attitude," but that taking precautions before a break-in or theft occurs saves time and money in the long run.

"It's all about increasing your awareness about security and understanding that everyone is vulnerable and targeted to some degree," Shawver said. "I'm always amused on the news when a criminal is caught and the neighbors all say the same thing - 'I live in a safe, secure neighborhood and I can't believe that my neighbor was a bad guy. Criminals live and operate everywhere. I don't think everyone out there is bad, or capable of bad behavior, but it's important as a business owner to take a couple of extra steps to protect yourself. If you do that then target-ability will go up elsewhere."

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storefront that could be vulnerable to criminal activity, such as thick bushes that block views of a door or window from the street, and access to doors in the rear of the building. In both instances, security cameras are recommended, which are relatively simple to install and affordable at stores like Best Buy and Target.

"Advances in Internet technologies make it easier than ever for business owners to set up basic security camera systems that record activity inside and outside your business, and store almost an endless amount of images recorded by those devices on your computer's hard drive," Bull said.

Shawver said he uses a more extreme, high-end security deadbolt company called Medeco. The company provides customers with a unique key that cannot be duplicated locally; it can only be re-made through a Medeco dealer, and it comes with an ID card with the customer's name on it that has to be presented, along with a second form of picture ID, before a new key will be made.

"The keys are made with ridges at various angles instead of all in one direction," he explained.

Shawver also said companies that have outside vendors come into their business after hours to do work, such as janitorial services, should place the key to their business in a coded lockbox outside the door, and change the code frequently.

"That way, anyone I want to can come

for security services, Portland-based Technocom is trying to expand its sales territory and push into Central Oregon. The company offers a service it calls UGuardU, which provides 24-hour camera surveillance of a property, private or commercial, with the video feed being accessible online. Technocom's Information Technology Director Gabe Authier said the company has received a good deal of new business from banks holding foreclosed properties that are interested in keeping a close eye on them because there has been a greater frequency of break-ins and theft since the



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