

WHAT A FEW INTEGRATORS THINK



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Based in the greater New York City area, AISG is best known for specializing in the design and deployment of open-platform, IP video surveillance systems, thermal imaging, access control and intrusion alarms in various vertical markets.

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Based in Suffern, New York, Total Recall is best known for donating a complete security upgrade at the Statue of Liberty following Hurricane Sandy, and is an electronic security firm specializing in large-scale security solutions for law enforcement and the corporate community.

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Security integration is a big, ongoing topic. There seems to be plenty of work these days to keep the aggressive and valued integrator busy. We wanted to know a few things about the work an integrator faces day in and day out, so we asked a few questions. Our integrators' profiles are listed herein.

HOW DO YOU DETERMINE WHAT SECURITY JOBS YOU WILL BID?

ACS: AISG rarely goes after bids, but when we do, we look for projects with challenges like multiple integrations between various platforms, manufacturers and equipment. In other words, we look for projects where our experience as integrators can be put to work, and of course, this type of project attracts less competition.

CLARK: First and foremost, we look at the owner of the project: Does that vertical fit within our business model? Second, we qualify the job by looking at the horizontals, technology requested and the scope: Is it something STS360 can deliver a quality final product on? Lastly, we look at the manufacturers specified and determine if it is a manufacturer we want to support: Do we want to sell a product we do not believe in?

Once that is determined we move forward, to bid or not bid. 'Something worth doing is worth doing right.' There could be no truer words in the security integration market.

HEILWEIL: Our best customers understand and appreciate the expertise we bring to the table. The bids we respond to are 'open design' bids where we can design and build a meaningful solution targeted to that specific customer's needs.

BOETHEL: We pursue new business opportunities that create long-term service relationships. If there is a project opportunity but no long-term service potential, we carefully scrutinize the opportunity and challenge ourselves as to why we should pursue it. Most of the time we don't. There are always strategic exceptions, but we try to remain disciplined in this regard.

JOHNS: We attempt to match our strengths with our customer's needs. When doing so we find that we can give a very competitive price and still supply exemplary service.

HOW MUCH TIME DOES IT TAKE TO COMPLETE A PROJECT ESTIMATE?

ACS: It all depends on how complex the project is and how many sites are interconnected or integrated.

CLARK: We have mandated within STS360 that for any direct opportunity request, we turn around the estimates including full scope of work, phases, warranty contract terms, and related documentation within 24-48 hours, depending on the complexity of the design. For smaller project estimates, we can turn the quote around within a business day, in most cases.

In our CRM, we can track when an opportunity started and what stage it is in. Opportunities not moving through stages in the appropriate timeframe are flagged and escalated to management to move the process along.

HEILWEIL: The time it takes to complete an estimate is dependent on project size and scope. Small projects may take under a week while large campus environments or a city solution may take 30 or 40 days. Our proposals are broken down and detailed so that the customer understands our vision for their solution.

BOETHEL: The time it takes to develop a project estimate depends on a number of factors, not the least of which is the size and complexity of the job. Our standard approach is to assign a pre-sale engineer or a team of engineers to larger, complex deals. Most of the time, we have a business development professional working closely and collaboratively with the engineer, and for the average size job—if there is such a thing—we can typically turn the estimate around in a day or so.

JOHNS: Project estimate production time varies significantly based on the size, complexity and scheduling needs of each project. We do not measure this matrix as it is better to get it right than get it fast.

DO YOU HAVE ANY INFLUENCE ON WHAT TYPE OF SECURITY PRODUCTS WILL BE USED?

ACS: Sixty percent of the time, the RFPs are written in a way to hard spec a product from a manufacturer. The other 40 percent, we can drive the bid.

CLARK: Management ultimately can veto or force-feed a product upon our team, but that is not our style. Frankly, we are not the ones who have to work with the client and satisfy their requirements on a day-to-day level, but we want to be able to empower our teams to do just that. If a sales person believes in the product they are selling, and the engineers believe in the product they are supporting, they will be successful and make the client happy.

Having said that, I do put limitations on manufacturers of product. We stick to top-tier products only and we refuse to be a 'jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none.'

HEILWEIL: We have been in the security industry for almost 30 years. When we are delivering a design build, we absolutely have input on which manufacturers' equipment we should use. We stand by, taking the time to understand our customer's needs, and then we design the solution from there. We always strive to use the best-of-breed when designing our solutions, while keeping costs and budgets in mind.

BOETHEL: I defer to my engineering team on what products comprise our solutions. We set company-wide standards for products, and our engineers select from those standards based on the specific and unique requirements of the job.

JOHNS: Product specification will also vary based on the project type and construction delivery methods. We do influence the products on many occasions, but we try to give our customers options, pros and cons and allow our customers to decide what is best for them.

IN A NEW BUILDING PROJECT, WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GENERAL CONTRACTOR?

ACS: This is where we shine. We work with the owners of the projects, which usually is a general contractor or an electrical contractor. We

will work with them from concept to implementation, and help design the project, bring in the right technology and implement it.

CLARK: A sense of partnership and reciprocation is essential when working with a GC that is managing the overall construction involving multiple trades. Having a good, strong and honest relationship with that GC is what makes things hap-

pen to remove barriers and meet timelines when you're dependent on other trades to do so. The bottom line is that they own that site until they hand it off to the client, so your commitment to them should be no different than if you were working directly with the client themselves.

HEILWEIL: When we are working with a GC or EC, we make a concerted effort to develop and main-

tain a good, working relationship. Communication is a key element. You have to remain flexible as the schedule may change. It can become challenging when construction delays cause delays in your installation schedule, but that's contracting.

BOETHEL: Our relationship with the general contractor takes one of two forms: We work directly for them, or we work directly for the

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end user and coordinate with the general contractor on related trade issues. We typically prefer to work directly for the end user because they need to be actively involved in the commissioning of systems. To the end user, working for the GC at arm's length can make that collaboration a challenge.

JOHNS: Again, this also depends on contract delivery and or procurement methods. Many times we are working directly for a general contractor; other times we work directly for owner coordinating with the general contractor.

HOW DO YOU BEST MEET THE TIME GUIDELINES OF AN INSTALL CONTRACT?

ACS: We work tightly with the customer on a weekly basis - project updates and forecasts - to make sure we meet all milestones and deadlines.

CLARK: The most important thing to meeting or exceeding installation timelines is being highly organized and communicative. I cannot stress enough how important these two factors are to us as a part of our core methodology at STS360. Internally, we have customized an incredibly robust infrastructure management system that encapsulates the two beautifully. All pieces of the project have to be working as one, and we always assign a single Project Manager to be responsible for this—from receipt of purchase order to final acceptance.

HEILWELL: Planning, planning, planning. Plan the project. It is crucial to plan and schedule your materials. Then, plan your build schedule. We plan each phase or task of the project with a timeline; then, we meet on a weekly basis to review our schedule and adjust accordingly.

BOETHEL: All aspects of the work are planned in advance. We produce work breakdown schedules and thoroughly plan each phase of our own implementation. We also help plan and coordinate the work of other related trades in order to ensure they finish in time for us to complete our work by the required finish date. We are often the last trade on the job and the last trade off the job.

JOHNS: Planning, planning, planning. Projects meet their schedules when schedules are well thought out, communicated and coordinated continuously from

the time the decision to bid is made through the last day of the warranty period.

DO YOU WORK WITH A SECURITY CONSULTANT? HOW ARE THEY BEST HELPFUL TO YOU?

ACS: Yes, we do. We create relationships with consultants, and these type of relationships are always a two way street. We can introduce a consultant to our customers for new business opportunities the same way the consultant has a trusted integrator who delivers the designed projects.

CLARK: For the most part, we do not work with security consultants. However, with our go-to-market strategy and myriad business, industry and technical experience, we are confident in our ability in providing assessments, design, engineering, scope writing, implementation planning, documentation, deployment management, and everything that goes in between.

HEILWELL: We have worked with several security consultants. It's a good working relationship with a good consultant that makes for a positive outcome on a job.

As our industry matures, many more standalone products are being integrated into solutions. Products may work on their own but not in the solution. Having consultants that understand that and work with you to resolve the issue makes for a much better relationship, and in turn, a happier customer.

BOETHEL: Consultants play an important role in the value chain, especially on the up-front risk analysis, threat assessment and systems planning. On construction projects, they play an invaluable role in the production of construction documents. The best consultants are those that appreciate the value that the integrator brings to the equation—not just the installation of technology, but also the design and value-based engineering of systems, commissioning of systems, and, perhaps most importantly, service after the sale.

JOHNS: Yes, many times we work with security consultants either through them acting as owner's reps or assisting us in development and installation of our systems. They are helpful by adding their expertise to the process, be it educating and looking out for the owner or assisting us directly in the planning, design and installation process. **DS**

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