Security industry must embrace modern PTT technologies for a more profitable, secure and efficient working environment

By Magnus Hedberg, CEO, GroupTalk

The global security industry is growing at a rapid pace. More professional and coordinated operations across disciplines and geographical borders among criminals, is one of the drivers of the increased demand for advanced security services. This calls for more intense surveillance and security, according to the Europol "Serious and Organized Crime Assessment Report". Gartner puts the global security market at $86bn, with annual growth of close to nine percent, citing "growing complexity of attacks".

At the same time the security industry finds itself in a consolidation phase, adapting new technologies with a strong focus on digital services and offers as *Security as a Service*. Intense competition in the industry are also squeezing profits, forcing security companies to focus on more logistically efficient solutions, cost savings, and smarter and safer interactions between security staff.

Out-dated communications routines

An important factor for safe and efficient security monitoring is the successful coordination and interconnection between guards and security control centres while patrolling, especially when covering large areas such as shopping malls, hotels, airports, event venues, logistics centres etc. However, most security staff around the world still uses traditional and out-dated two-way radios (walkie-talkies) with a momentary button to switch from voice reception mode to transmit mode, when communicating. Building radio networks, programming and providing two way radios is complicated and time consuming. This is ancient and inefficient communication technology, not suitable for an industry with low margins that also needs to be in the technological forefront, aiming to be secure, flexible, efficient and profitable.

Until now, development and deployment of efficient communication tools have been very costly and complicated. In some cases the technology has become out-dated before it has been completely rolled out. For smaller security companies this has not even been an option. For them it has been virtually impossible, for economic reasons, to get a modern communications solution with a good geographical coverage.

Push-to-talk technology improves security company's competitiveness

But this is about to change, since there is huge potential to improve communication between the members of the security staff with more modern, yet simple and user friendly, technologies. An increasing number of security companies tend to abandon the ancient walkie-talkie communication solutions, replacing them with more modern communications solutions, based on digital models such as the push-to-talk (PTT) over cellular phones, a service that enables subscribers to use their phones as walkie-talkies with unlimited range over the existing mobile networks. PTT has several advantages:

- PTT enables simple and safe communication between employees through the push of a single button.

- It is a cost efficient cloud-based solution that allows communication directly through the users' smartphones (and tablets/laptops).
- It is secure.
- It uses existing mobile networks, with no need to build and maintain your own network.
- The sound is much clearer than walkie-talkies, which reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings.
- The administrator easily controls the number of users, PTT groups (known as "channels" when using walkie-talkies) and user access.
- The solution can include push-to-talk accessories such as acoustic headsets etc.
- Use of Bluetooth-based PTT buttons in combination with smartphones for instant voice communication.
- It is fast; it just takes hours to roll out a cloud-based PTT service to companies with 10,000's of users.
- It is easy to connect different organizations with PTT.
- The flexibility to control who receives panic alarms and the routing of voice communication is "game changing" in relation to how traditional two-way radios and alarm solutions are working.
- The new technology-based smartphones can be easily integrated with existing communication radio systems so that you can benefit from the investments already made.
- With an IP-based PTT solution, services are no longer geographically limited. Now you can communicate with PTT services across borders, globally and also with users at sea and in aircrafts.

Many companies in the security industry has come to appreciate the flexibility in a solution that could be used on different staffing sizes, without having to make major new investments in communication systems. Being able to link staff in a communications network, gives them an opportunity to share information and resources in a way that they have not been able to do with their previous traditional communications systems. This is a solution that not only provides the user with a integrated panic alarm in the service, but it also saves them money compared to if they were to purchase separate personal alarms for each and everyone in the staff.

"Substantial savings"

Big security companies have the resources to be in the forefront and adopt new communication solutions, most of them are already rolling out smartphone based communications solutions. Interestingly, with the cloud based PTT services, the barrier to use the new solutions is virtually gone for companies of all sizes and the SMB (Small Medium Business) segment is a fast mover to leverage these solutions to get a competitive edge.

A real life example of this is Norwegian security company, Telemark Sikkerhet, who in 2016 wanted to improve communication between the staff and making it more secure. The result can only be described as fantastic. The solution has improved communication in the working process for Telemark Sikkerhet with results such as:

• Improved security surveillance
• Improved competitiveness

- Reduced cost
- Dedicated staff and improved work environment

Smartphones are used to share information and status by both voice and text in order to improve accuracy, traceability and efficiency in communications. Text based communication ads traceability and clarity to PTT, creating an unbeatable combination. Automated machine-to-machine (M2M) communications is also gaining popularity as a supplement to PTT, e.g. in the airline industry for status updates like boarding and refuelling complete in aircraft turn arounds. Security companies can use status messages when they arrive at a destination, enter a specific area, have completed a task, etc. to keep guards in their team and the dispatch at the security control centre up to date with the latest status.

Time limited and defined project tool

Security is perhaps one of the industries that can draw the most obvious benefits from the new advanced PTT group communications solutions. But PTT has also gained interest from organisations in other industries where instant group communications are instrumental, such as aviation, construction/infrastructure, energy and retail.

An increasing number of companies appreciate the fact that the new solutions are cost efficient, scalable and flexible, that allow staff of various sizes to communicate, without having to make major new investments in communication systems.

Being able to link people working together in what can be described as 'time limited and clearly defined short projects' in a user friendly communications network gives them an opportunity to share information and resources in a way that they have not been able to do with their previous traditional communication devices.

PTT solutions based on standard smartphones and tablets/laptops make task group communications faster, more flexible, secure – and, not least – more cost efficient. It might be the single most efficient and beneficial measure that the security industry can implement the solution in their quest for improved packaged services and lower costs.

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