

# Product certifications to increase in value, necessity

By L. SAMUEL PFEIFLE

It's easy to understand the reticence of some security systems integrators to pay for product training. After all, without integrators making sales and installations, where would manufacturers be?

"There's just too many people clawing at our business for us to be paying for training," said Bob Ryan, VP of sales and marketing at ASG Security. "One company wanted us to pay for a webinar-based training, and we were like, 'We're selling your stuff, what are you talking about?' There's too many small companies who are late to the party and we don't see why we should pay the cover charge for them."

But there is a new wave of IT systems

if you're paying for it, you're expecting to get something out of it. We've found that if there's no skin in the game, if there's no dollars in the game, you have no idea if they're going to show up."

This sentiment is echoed almost exactly by Paul Bodell, VP of marketing for IP camera maker IQinVision. "We initially didn't charge for training," he said, "and we had high registration and low turn out. So we went with a token fee: Twenty bucks. That increased the attendance quite a bit. It's like a webinar—they sign up and then don't show up if there's no skin in the game."

"The one thing we've seen, for sure, is that traditional security integrators, they would never

were to charge for training, we'd want to make sure there's a value add offset to that. There's a cost of training to the integrators beyond what we might charge: the travel, the loss of revenue from taking guys out of the field, so we're very cognizant of what we're asking and requesting of the dealers ... If we were to charge for it, there would be a value add component to it. Our intent is to not charge for training, we want to drive certifications."

That value add? "For example," said Musshafen, "they'll come in for the program and we'll give them a dongle to allow them to use the full functionality of the product. We don't look at [the Readykey training] as a profit center. It's a break even."

This value add is a common practice for manufacturers charging for training. Right now, IQinVision is advertising a certification course in March in Boston. The price is \$195 just for the training, but for \$895 you also take home a two megapixel IP day/night camera that you can use for demonstration purposes or resell if you so choose. Similarly, Arecont sends training seminar members who pay the \$500 fee home with a "megakit," which is basically a briefcase with a camera, a lens, and other peripherals. "It's a tangible takeaway," said Jason Schimpf, who designed the Arecont training course, "and they can go out and start selling the technology that we've taught them about."

Both camera makers emphasized that if their training was purely about their products, attendees wouldn't be

**Make space on the wall: Product certifications are going to increase in importance and value—and that's why you'll need to pay for them.**

integrators coming into the security industry, particularly with video installations, and they're well used to paying for certifications on products from Cisco, Microsoft, and the like. Similarly, IP-based product manufacturers are now often charging for training and certification, as they too come from that IT world and not only is it commonplace there, but they feel the reasons for it being commonplace are sound. "I think, generally speaking, in the IP side of the space, most everyone is charging for education," said Raul Calderon, VP of strategic relations for Arecont Vision, an IP camera manufacturer. Part of the reason for that, he said, is the idea that "anything worth going to is worth paying for. And

pay for training," Bodell continued, "because that's what Bosch and Pelco did. That was the charm of working with them in a commoditized market. When you're still charging a premium, you've got to give something for that, and they were giving certification and support. That's the paradigm they're involved with. The IT guys, they've always paid for training, they don't even bat an eye."

It's true. Jim Musshafen, director of training for Bosch, said the company has thus far kept training free for all but training on the Readykey Pro access control product line, but it's something that the company is considering. "We meet with a handful of integrators every six to eight weeks, and this is an area we spend quite a bit of time on," Musshafen said. "Our objective is that if we

satisfied. It's their attention to IP-based video as a whole that makes people happy, they said.

However, it's evaluation-based product certification that seems to be the clincher for integrators, and they're not above negotiating.

"In my opinion," said Perry Levine, senior director of business development for Siemens' security operations, "certifications are a key element to training, and training without certification might as well not take place. Nothing says they learned the material just because they sat in the class. I think certification is a must." And because these certifications are becoming increasingly important in a relationship with a vendor—IQinVision, for example, requires you be certified in order to install their Pro line of products—integrators are placing more value on them and, in some ways, scrambling to make sure they keep ahead of competition.

"A lot of customers will go to a vendor and ask, 'Who can install such and such?'" said Derek Bischoff, technical services manager at Intelligent Access Systems of North Carolina. "And more and more vendors are evaluating their dealers based not just on their own certification, but what other certification do their employees have. And we're seeing where dealers are being evaluated and being given a grade based on investment, equipment training internally and externally, and so I think vendors are getting more sophisticated about answering that question of who's a good dealer in the area. Being a good dealer is very important to us." Musshafen noted that certification isn't just for the right to sell certain Bosch products, "it's for technical support as well," he said. Say an integrator takes over a job where product has been installed previously, and the integrator calls in for service: "We will do a verification to make sure they've been through training, and if they haven't they'll

have to get into training as soon as possible ... We want to make sure the technical support team is talking to a certified integrator."

Bischoff agreed about the testing element, as well: "I see more frequently that the manufacturers that we tend to desire training from have some sort of evaluation ... Those that have been just basically a document shop, where you pay the money and they sign everybody's document, we don't repeat that training. That's not valuable for us."

But what of this idea that large companies can demand free training, since they're a company's entree to the end users? "I guess there is a benefit to being one of the bigger guys on the block," Ryan at ASG admitted, "but PSA will train you, even ADI will train you, they'll give you the agnostic kind of training." And it's definitely true that bigger companies can get the manufacturers to come to them, as they can gather together many techs to be certified at one time, but any advantages for big companies have been largely downplayed by those interviewed by SSN.

"Do big guys get a different treatment?," Bodell asked, "Well, kind of. The scales aren't as tipped as you might imagine, though." "They're maybe only training one or two people that manage four or five offices," said Arecont's Schimpf of the larger companies, by way of agreement, "whereas a smaller dealer can make an entire company come. That's not going to happen at an ADT." "I think it all depends on the size of the local organization," said Levine at Siemens. "We're a big organization, yes, but our resources are spread out in our hundred locations. And the size of any one of our locations is comparable to any other local integrator. It's not like we have a pool of resources centrally that we can dedicate. The biggest cost of the training is the cost of pulling the person out of the field. To that end, there's a level of training that requires certification and in-classroom training, but there's other levels of certification, like updates to a product, that need to be available by some kind of web based training."

Manufacturers say they're working on it, or already have programs in place. Schimpf at Arecont said it was on the roadmap, and would be part of a three-tiered approach to training whereby the most intense learning would probably have to be done at Arecont's corporate facility, but basic IP video fundamentals and typical camera set-up information could be conveyed via roadshow or Internet. Even companies not all that invested in IP, like Mace Security, are investing in online training. Mace recently unveiled its Mace University, which has a large portion of its training now online.

But the training that is likely to lead to a certification on a high-end product will probably remain an in-person thing for the foreseeable future, and that training will likely be an investment you'll have to make if you want to sell that product. Manufacturers of sophisticated products want to control who is representing that product in the market. "Tyco has such a program for its Software House product line," Levine noted. "Part of the certification requires not only training on Software House, but industry training from Microsoft and Cisco, too. And that program makes a difference when there's a lot of competition on the project."

An integrator's resume of certifications will take on a larger and larger profile in winning bids, those interviewed predicted. "We are seeing more and more demand from the integrators and the end users, the project managers, for verifications that the integrator is certified on the product," said Bosch's Musshafen. So make sure you've got money in the budget for training. While some of the old-line and larger manufacturers will still offer free training, and the distributors will likely supplement that, if you want to install the highest-level products and the newest technologies, you're going to need certifications. SSN