

Cable-free route to business



“By focusing on wire-free installations, which tend to take a few hours instead of the day or more needed for hardwired systems, installers can free more engineer resources for higher-margin, large-scale industrial installations,” says Tony Mann

REMEMBER THE DAYS WHERE ALMOST every job involved crawling through lofts while trailing meters of cable, shifting heavy cabinets filled with Great-Aunt Mabel’s prized glass collection, and hunting for elusive cables hidden in walls?

As recently as two years ago, that was still the norm, despite the fact that wireless security products had been on the market for more than a decade. Now, instead of turning to wireless systems only for sites in which it was impossible to run cables, many installation companies are making a strategic decision to focus on wireless. But, taking the wire-free route is about far more than escaping those musty lofts. Rather, it’s about providing a better end-user experience, reducing costs and, ultimately, accelerating business.

Mike Reddington, MD of ADI Global Distribution, explains the drive to wireless: “Wireless equipment is a high growth market with demand and sales climbing significantly year on year compared to hard wired systems. Wireless is now a more stable technology option with reduced time for installation and less décor disruption that allows companies to obtain a better utilisation of their labour resources.”

Wires and consumers

Installing a hardwired security system in an existing house or flat often causes significant

Wireless security in the UK has reached a milestone. No longer a solution of last resort for residential and small commercial sites, it is now becoming the default, says Tony Mann, MD of Visonic UK, who looks at why installers are taking the cable-free route ...

disruption and mess. For an average house, the process usually takes a full day.

The homeowner needs to stay home from work for the duration and put up with the mess of drilled-through walls, lifted carpets and shifted furniture. Not anyone’s idea of fun, to say the least.

And, that’s when things go well. The complexity of laying cables opens the way to unwelcome surprises for homeowners. Punctured pipes, damaged walls, scrape marks on furniture, and visible wires can leave homeowners not just unhappy, but also unlikely to recommend the installer to others.

In the residential marketplace, where word of mouth is the main source of new business, a few less-than-perfect installations can significantly impact on business.

Once the system is installed and working, the occupants of the house are locked into specific behaviours: they must leave and return by the front door; and, usually, they must commit a multi-digit code to memory and remember to type it on the key pad within a few seconds every time they come inside.

For those of us used to operating alarm systems, this doesn’t sound like a big deal. However for end-users trying to enter their code in a panic before the sirens activate, it can be a daunting experience.

Wireless panels, such as the PowerMax from Visonic, can be placed almost anywhere, simplifying installation and enabling a versatile user experience



Fitting today’s unwired world

Locked Up Monitored Security has, since its inception in the mid-1990s, offered only wireless systems, many of them based on Visonic wireless security systems and peripherals, and integrated with other wireless systems and components such as CCTV.

Martin West, owner and business strategist, says he has noticed a real change in consumers’ expectations over the past few years.

“The most profound change we are seeing is that consumers now expect wire-free as the norm,” he said.

“This has come about due to the expansion of readily available wire-free technologies that touch every aspect of their lives, from GPRS laptops to mobile phones, Wi-Fi wireless home networks, Blue tooth, Wii, and so forth. The new generation of broadband-enabled wire-free systems integrate security, safety, home automation and CCTV, truly converging multiple technologies to match consumers’ expectations.”

With wireless security systems, the user experience fits right in with today’s wireless lifestyle and is very intuitive.

For example, Visonic wireless home security systems can be turned on and off using a small keyfob that resembles the remote controls we all use to lock and unlock our cars.

“There’s no need for family members to

remember a numeric code, and they can come and go from the house through any of the doors.

Accommodating new applications

UK home décor is not what it was. With changing fashions more and more homeowners are moving from the traditional carpeting to hard flooring, including hardwood, laminate and ceramic tiles. This creates a new set of challenges for hardwired security system installations, as there is no carpet under which to hide wires.

If detached buildings, such as a garage or shed, also need to be protected, wireless systems are ideal, eliminating the complexity and cost of laying underground cables.

In today's depressed housing market, more homeowners are renovating instead of buying a new home. With wire-free systems, integrating additions and other structural alterations is very simple.

Even if the existing system is hardwired, adding more wired components is often not the easiest or most cost effective option. Rather, installing a new wireless system for the whole house may be cheaper whilst providing a better experience for the homeowner.

There is also the option to utilise the existing components in combination with a wireless system, by using a bolt-on radio module with volt-free contacts to trigger the control panel's hardwired zones.

Making smart use of resources

Laying security system cables is a skill that can take a year-plus of apprenticeship to truly master. And, even for a skilled, experienced engineer, it is a slow and laborious process, fraught with complications.

In today's market, in which every company needs to expand revenues without expanding the workforce, and given the prevailing shortage of skilled engineers and the relatively high expense commanded, it doesn't make sense to have engineers tied up running cables through homes.

With the broad offering of wireless systems and components available today, residential and small commercial sites can be well-served by wireless systems. By focusing on wire-free installations, which tend to take a few hours instead of the day or more needed for hardwired systems, installers can free more engineer resources for higher-margin, large-scale industrial installations.

Not only are wireless systems a good fit with today's consumers; they also match the natural capabilities of today's younger generation of engineers. More technology-focused than those who entered the profession many years ago, engineers today are quick to grasp how sophisticated wireless systems work. And, they're happier configuring a digital system than crawling around with cables.

Wireless systems enable user operation with a small keyfob – familiar to anyone who uses a remote control to lock/unlock their car



New skills, changing mindsets

Transitioning to wireless requires some changes in mindset and working methods. Surveyors need to understand how wireless systems work in order to identify the best locations for control panels, detectors and other peripherals.

Engineers need to understand how to properly install wireless systems, how radio signals are transmitted, and fault finding techniques. All of these things are fairly straightforward and easy to learn. Wireless systems also bring changes to the business side. For example, maintaining wireless systems involves replacing many batteries in the system instead of just one. Hence, battery changes must be scheduled along with planned preventative maintenance visits in order to avoid costly call-backs.

Of course, concerns regarding reliability must be addressed. When installers commit to an installation, they need to be sure that the various components can communicate across the required range. Understanding the equipment

and doing a range field test prior to installing the product is advisable. Visonic and other manufacturers offer repeaters or extenders to overcome the challenges of large sites.

The frequency used by the security system can have a significant impact on reliability. In the UK, look for products that use the dedicated 868 MHz frequency, rather than the generic 433 MHz, which is vulnerable to interference.

Whilst there are many wireless security products available for the DIY market, installers can be confident in talking to consumers about the very large difference between a DIY product and a professional solution.

In addition to frequency, compliance with standards is also important. Professional products, including all Visonic supervised wireless security equipment, comply with the requirements of EN50131 Grade 2, enabling them to be used where insurance approval is required and for police response applications.

DIY equipment typically has no grading or at best complies with Grade 1, which does not meet insurance or police requirements. Additionally, DIY security equipment is not as easy to install as most people assume, so that improper installation frequently leads to problems.

Good sense and good business

The robustness, reliability and value of wireless security for the home security market is now well-proven. Today, wireless makes sense for consumers and installers alike, offering a superior experience for end users and enabling time and cost savings for installers.

Whilst hardwired still has a place in industrial applications, as currently there are few wireless systems robust enough for the most demanding applications, it's really only a matter of time.

At Visonic we're working to leverage our wireless technologies and expertise and develop industrial-strength wire-free solutions. Installers who have wireless experience in the residential market will be best placed to take advantage of the future wireless opportunity in the industrial and large commercial market.

*www.visonic.com

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