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ALL EYES ON YOU

Hoteliers have realised that the right surveillance solutions can not only ward off imminent issues, it can help them monitor and improve daily operations

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

In January this year, armed thieves stole jewels and other valuables worth 4.5 million from Ritz Carlton Hotel in Paris. This brazen heist in one of the world's most prestigious neighbourhoods firmly brought into the spotlight the need for security solutions.

In the context of the hospitality business, these solutions encompass a gamut

of needs from ensuring physical safety of people as well as property and other assets. Physical security can be broadly categorised into internal and external aspects.

The former includes making provisions against theft or physical harm for all people on the premises, fire incidents, ensuring proper lighting throughout

the property, tracking unwanted guests and safeguarding assets. External security entails adequate lighting outside the building, proper fencing of the building and pool area to avoid accidents at nights, manning service gates to restrict unauthorised entry and using video surveillance to monitor all movements within and outside the hotel.



Hotels and restaurants are meant to foster an inviting and friendly atmosphere; they have to adhere to this principle, while keeping a close watch over the movements of guests and staff on the premises. This can be a challenging task for the security personnel and the front desk employees who are assigned this job. Hence, hospitality companies invest significantly in training them regularly to stay on top of the game.

The first thing they are trained on is on getting the credentials of all guests checking into a hotel. "This is a strict protocol, which should be followed by every staff member and employee of the hotel. Some of the key security and surveillance concerns that hotels and restaurants face currently are lone attacks on single/solo guests, theft of merchandise or personal belongings, and other items



that are expensive or important such as documents with identity details. We are extremely clear in our instructions to guests and visitors alike. We review every detail, including keycards (room entry cards), after-hours access, maintain emergency response protocols with the local police stations and hospitals located nearby the hotel and are committed to training our employees and staff on security measure of all types," averred Rohit Vig, MD, Staywell Hospitality Group.

Rajesh Kumar, head of security, Leela Palace, Bangalore opined, "Any security and surveillance technology can only give us greater return on investment when team members are fully trained and can master its usage. It is always recommended that technology should not master the human asset. Thus, the most important training of security related information is imparted only to the security staff but also to all departments in the hotel. Additionally, multiple entry and exits to the hotel and restaurant should be avoided."

SURVEILLANCE MATTERS

The hospitality and tourism industries are the largest and fastest-growing industries in the world. At same time, this growth carries the risks associated with natural disasters, fire, criminal activities and many other crises that fall under accidental threats like hazardous material spills. Security is not limited to a single aspect, it is been classified into various types and safety, too, which



✉ Rohit Vig-Managing Director StayWell Hospitality Group in India

involves preventing employees and customers within the hotel property from accidental slips as well as preventing related property damage.

Ashvini Kumar, safety and security manager and certified protection professional, Novotel Hyderabad Airport said, "In hotels, surveillance is the top priority as they strive to create an environment that is both welcoming and secure. However, this is not an easy task as the presence of security personnel may upset customers if they find it over-intrusive or an invasion of their privacy."

Hence, hoteliers conduct regular workshops to ensure their security force is careful to work in a sensitive and calm fashion without causing any discomfort to guests. They are also trained to conduct preventive maintenance of the surveillance systems to ensure that these function properly.

Most hotels employ myriad solutions including fire and security alarm systems, access control systems including card key, locks, safes and biometric systems. Many have conventional background screening protocols, CCTV with night vision, motion sensors and are in instant coordination with relevant authorities like fire brigade, police station.

Additionally, keeping pace with technology changes, they continue to invest in surveillance systems like IP and WiFi-enabled cameras, face detection systems. Talking about these solutions, Kumar explained that video solutions include the three theoretical identification views of a CCTV system namely subject identification, action identification and scene identification. In hotels, there are specific areas where these cameras can add a great value to security, like cash counters, lobby, restaurants, guest corridors and lifts.



✉ Rajesh Kumar, Head of Security, Leela Bangalore

"To meet these needs while installing the cameras it is important to keep some things in mind - the purpose of each camera and areas to be viewed by a particular camera, environment as this may affect the camera's performance and its mounting. After this, the proper equipment (camera) needs to be chosen as per the requirement - whether standard analogue CCD camera, IP camera, Infrared (IR) cameras or thermal camera. The recording system needs to be chosen as per the requirement - digital video recorders (DVRs), Network video recorders or server/cloud applications are some choices," he pointed out.

There are different types of CCTV cameras, like the bullet-type, dome, discreet CCTVs, infrared, varifocal, network, high-definition, etc. The high-definition cameras are useful in dim-light areas as its lens can capture images in better details.

While this equipment is important in ensuring that security is upheld in hotels, in addition to installing surveillance systems, brands continue to follow strict protocols while maintaining security measures by placing key personnel in major areas of the hotel that are accessible to the public. This includes the entrance, exit and entertainment zones, including hallways, entry corridors and parking lots.

"Our security and surveillance teams are experts from the industry. The equipment leverage use is state-of-the-art technology and we keep recorded files of all our properties in a secure space. We also take time to educate our guests and visitors to be alert and look after their

belongings in case of any untoward incidents that may occur," said Vig.

ROI MATTERS

The security of guests and employees is very important when it comes to any hotel or restaurant. Hence, the best-of-breed products and solutions always offer better return on investment.

"To ensure that products are used to their best capacity, proper training should be provided to the staff so that maximum returns on the investment can be recovered by the hotel or restaurant. Sufficient investment in cyber security and incident response plans, conducting thorough background checks of employees and monitoring their activity, video recording with metadata, monitoring subcontractors and third-party service providers, training staff to be alert about suspicious activities, creating advanced alert and notification system are some solutions used in hotels and restaurants to minimise security risks," said Santosh J, assistant manager, VITS Hotels Worldwide.

By regularly training its staff and employees on security measures, Staywell Hospitality has been successful in ensuring that it maintains a safe and secure environment for its guests. Since the hospitality sector operates on reputation, a single untoward incident can impact business.

"As a brand, we can face massive losses if our security protocol measures are lacking. In the case of any untoward incident, we have a strict set of orders that are followed and the legal and police will be involved if there is an urgent need for their presence," added Vig.

THE RIGHT SUPPLIER

With the plethora of security and surveillance solutions available, it is pertinent that hotels and restaurants choose the right solution provider who can provide them with the systems they require. "When choosing a vendor for these solutions, one should consider their commitment to quality, cost, additional resources and capabilities, their prior work profile, contract terms and most importantly, the confidentiality clauses to ensure that the vendor has well-defined security policies," Santosh recommended.

Ideally, before selecting a vendor or even starting the selection process, it is



Hotéis follow strict protocols like placing key personnel in major areas of the hotel, including the entrance and exit.





✉ Santosh J, assistant manager, VITS Hotels Worldwide.

advised that their technical and business requirements is defined and documented in detail. Hotels like also conduct an extensive research to identify potential vendors and choose the best that suit their requirements.

Most hoteliers prefer working with local companies since they can provide cost-effective solutions. "We work with both local suppliers and international companies based on the scope of work. We prefer local vendors as they are more approachable than global companies," added Ashvini Kumar.

These providers partner with multiple brands to can provide a bouquet of products at viable prices with economical installation costs. Since they are locally based, technical support is quicker and they often provide online and offline support. Spare parts or other certified peripherals are also easily available.

In addition to usability, post-installation, regular training of staff is important. "Usually these suppliers are committed when it comes to training our staff for use of the security and surveillance solutions and its maintenance. However, sometimes, it does happen that hotels have to follow up with the supplier to get the work done," explained Santosh.

In most cases, suppliers have quick response teams who are always ready to be present at any time of the day or night to ensure that safety measures are up-to-date. Since, this is an industry that needs to be on its toes 24x7, security protocols and methods have to be monitored by the minute. While there might be some discrepancies, at the time of any crisis, hoteliers always try to ensure that their



➲ In hotels, there are specific areas where surveillance cameras can add a great value to security, like cash counters, lobby, restaurants, guest corridors and lifts.

guests are secure before anything else is taken care of.

maintain the reporting line of communication around the clock," said Vig.

BEING EFFICIENT

Considering that security is an aspect that cannot be compromised, these solutions need to perform optimally. Continuous audit has to be done on a timely basis to ensure that the solutions are working effectively and efficiently. Also the staff has to be updated and trained about any new upgradations in the system so they can ensure the smooth functioning of the solutions.

Vendor visit for equipment installation and maintenance should also be well planned. For example, the baggage scanner vendor should be called only when there is low occupancy and lower guest visits are expected. In banquets, equipment should be installed or repaired or staff trained only when there are no events.

"The hospitality industry is light years ahead of time in surveillance and security systems. We have a team of experts who are on standby and they also train and skill our employees. We have strict procedures when it comes to keeping our security and surveillance systems up to date. Also, every upgrade, no matter the expense, is purchased and installed to maintain a zero-tolerance environment and keep our guests safe. Every member is trained in surveillance operations and they have to

NEW VISTAS

As the hospitality business booms, hoteliers will need to ensure that their security and surveillance solutions are up-to-date by reviewing it regularly. Mahendra Kumar, security manager of Anya Hotels stated that after installation, they touch base with the vendor and schedule training twice a month for their security staff. To ensure that the products and systems are well maintained, we have follow up with the service provider at regular intervals.

"Our staff is thoroughly trained in system operating and routine troubleshooting. Additionally, a comprehensive AMC is in place and all necessary terms is mentioned in the AMC document. A penalty clause is also included in this is the complaint is not attended to within a particular time frame and regular checks are not carried out," Kumar added.

Hotels and restaurants have realised that by installing the right surveillance solutions, they can not only ward off imminent problems, these systems can also help them monitor and improve daily operations. What's more they can leverage it to enhance guest experience. With so many benefits, they are leaving no stone unturned to make the most of this opportunity. ■