

State of the Industry Panelists:

Balance Technology, Business Skills, and Customer Relationships

Thanks to incredible insight from a panel of four security industry professionals, those squeezed into the standing room-only Sands Expo and Convention Center meeting room for Wednesday's State of the Industry Keynote left armed with a wealth of information and questions to ask exhibitors as they walked the ISC West show floor.

The 50-minute discussion covered security and business challenges that systems integrators, service providers, manufacturers, and customers face. Moderator Sandy Jones of Sandra Jones & Co., set the tone with her first question: What is the biggest challenge you and your counterparts face today?

In response, Microsoft's Mike Howard acknowledged that while the challenges are many, the biggest are remaining relevant and providing leadership in a post-recession climate that's vastly different than it was just three years ago. "We're living in a new 'normal,'" he said. "We represent a traditional cost center, and there's been a paradigm shift where funding no longer exists or is severely reduced. The challenge of positioning ourselves as a value-add to the C-suite is the biggest challenge all of us in the industry face."

The most-discussed topic during the information-packed conversation was technology. Providing the customer and end user perspective, Jamie Rosland Haenggi of Protection One spoke to the challenges of managing customer expectations and demands in today's marketplace, which she referred to as "app world." Between new technologies like broadband, smart phones and apps, home automation, and VoIP, the industry is under increased pressure to diversify their offerings beyond security.

"Customers aren't comparing security against security. They're comparing it to what they see in everyday life. We're getting bundled and triple-played to death, so it's important to move forward with and embrace GSM and other technologies," Haenggi said. "There are a lot of new players in home automation with deep pockets. I'm not sure where that's going, but it's important that the security industry owns that mindshare and that wallet. We have to go beyond the home and figure out how we can bundle other services."

Bill Taylor of Panasonic System Networks of America said that, while technological advances deliver a multitude of benefits to end users, including the ability to save money by doing more with less, manufacturers and software developers have to make that technol-



>> IT WAS STANDING-ROOM-ONLY AS ATTENDEES PACKED THE MEETING ROOM TO LISTEN TO WEDNESDAY'S STATE OF THE INDUSTRY KEYNOTE.

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ogy accessible. At the same time, installers and integrators have to be able to present end users with a business case to support emerging technologies such as intelligent video.

"The technology is something that's far beyond what end users understand – and they don't want to understand it. They just want to be safe and secure," he said. "Video analytics is going to be big because now you're doing something with the information that's coming in, not just preventing threats. It opens the door to business applications such as measuring the effectiveness of merchandising displays and analyzing customer traffic patterns."

Carey Boethel of Siemens Building



>> STATE OF THE INDUSTRY PANELISTS (LEFT TO RIGHT) BILL TAYLOR, MIKE HOWARD, JAMIE ROSLAND HAENGGI, AND CAREY BOETHEL.

Technologies said that recent years have brought an increased amount of regulatory requirements for many industries that haven't traditionally been governed by legislation. This development presents a non-technology area where installers and integrators can shine – and grow their bottom line.

"Customer and end user needs are more complex today, and a lot is driven by legislation. The environment of regulatory issues is tough to navigate, so if you can be a subject matter expert, you add more value," Boethel said. "It

used to be just in industries like health-care and utilities, but today it's expanding into food and beverage, chemical, pharma, and a lot more."

Jones provided perhaps the best summary of the balance needed between technology, relationships, and becoming a subject matter expert. "Developers can work on the 'smart stuff,' but you need to know your customer. You'd better understand their business and recognize that you can't be all things to all people. You have to develop an expertise," she said. ■