

NEWS

Special report: Women in security

Though the ranks are growing, there are still efforts that can be made

By Martha Entwistle

When young girls dream of high-powered careers, a

glam job in the security industry is probably not first on the wish list, or second, or even tenth.

Why's that? Well, to be fair, the security industry is small compared to other industries, so it's just not

on many peoples' radars—male or female.

For the most part, women

who work in the industry today—with the exception of some who come from law enforcement or military back-



Kerry Egan

grounds—didn't go looking for a job in security. They either just fell into a career in security by chance, or, like many, they were born into the industry: Grandfather started an alarm company and now, the third generation, a granddaughter, is running the show.

It's hard to find statistics on the percentage of women who work in security. Women make up roughly 10 percent of the ASIS membership, but you only need to walk an ASIS or ISC West show floor to see just how male-dominated the industry is.

And speaking of show floors, it's here that some boorish customs—stuff you'd think went out with secretarial pools and three-martini lunches—live on. Business bait in the form of booth babes at trade shows is still a reality in 2009. The good news, women interviewed for this story agreed, is that every year there appear to be fewer scantily clad booth attendants and more women in business garb, who actually work in security, in attendance at these shows.

By most indications, in fact, women's ranks in security are growing in all quarters. For this story, *Security Systems News* spoke to women security directors, alarm company CEOs and partners, Fortune 500 executives, manufacturing company owners, and women with a variety of titles.

Beth Tarnoff, director of marketing for Stanley Convergent Security Systems, said more than half of SCSS's field headquarters' staff are women. "That mix holds true for key positions with manager roles, director roles, and even senior financial roles here in the headquarters office," she said.

Rebecca Bligh works for Provident Security, a fast-growing alarm company in Vancouver. "Men and women work in all positions from senior managers, to installation to guard services. I work in sales and have done so for five years," she said. "Typically, people are surprised to see a female arriving to provide a walk-through and subsequent quote," Bligh added.

Other women report encountering surprise or skepticism on the job. Kerry Egan is vice president of Security Partners. Egan's father, Patrick Egan, founded Commonwealth Security before establishing Select Security and

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Security Partners. Kerry Egan grew up working part-time jobs at the company during high school and college. Despite her years of experience, first meetings with males frequently go like this: "Initially no one will listen to me, but after I start talking for a while, they listen ... my experience gives me leverage."

Eddie Reynolds and Joni (pronounced "Johnny") Hamasaki, co-owners of Illuminar, a manufacturer of infra-red illuminators and license plate recognition systems, have years of technical security experience. They also have male-sounding names, so there may be a good reason why people are surprised when they meet Eddie or Joni in person

for the first time.

It's not uncommon Hamasaki said, "for a customer to say, 'Can I get a technician to help me?' I say 'That's me.' And they say, 'You can help me?'" Clients get over their initial skepticism quickly, she said. "We resolve the issue, and they don't mind that I'm a woman, and they call again."

Customers remember their work, and they remember their names. "You never forget a woman named

Eddie," Reynolds said.

Clearly some barriers exist for women in security, so why bother? Why don't these smart, energetic women take their talents to a more hospitable industry?

The answer is simple: opportunity. Guess what? You can get that glam job in security—or at least a challenging, well-paying job.

Kerry Egan wanted to stay away from security, but after working in other industries for a while, "I



Illuminar co-owners Joni Hamasaki and Eddie Reynolds

came back because it seemed silly to me not to use all the experience I had," she said. Plus, "there's no other business that can match the benefits of being in the recurring revenue business."

Shandon Harbour, president of SDA Security, who was also born into the industry, concurred: "It's a profitable and lucrative business model; there isn't any other model like it out there."

Marcia Raab is chief marketing officer and a partner at Defender Direct, the largest ADT dealer in the country. In November 2009, Defender was named Best Overall Company of the Year at the 2009 Stevie Awards for Women in Business, an international competition that recognizes women executives, business owners and the organizations they operate. Defender has an extensive training program for all of its employees. Women are well represented in the company and make up about 50 percent of its sales force.

Raab has seen many women make great strides professionally at her company. Raab points out Misti Simpson, who started at Defender in a front-line job answering calls and making \$8 per hour. Five years later, she is director of sales, runs a team of 200 sales reps, and makes a six-figure salary.

Women tend to excel in residential sales jobs, Raab said, because the decision maker in most cases is another woman.

Nell Matthews is general manager, and began her career at Atronic Alarm 20 years ago doing accounting. She agreed with Raab, but also noted the importance of hands-on experience in the dealer side of security. It "can be hard to acquire, but is often essential in getting in the door," Matthews said.

Truth is, while many men start off as installers and eventually start their own business, few women become installers. That's not to say that they can't do this, they just don't tend to.

And if you've never "turned a wrench" as Shandon Harbour puts it, there's a different learning curve. "We can be as shrewd as anyone else, go toe-to-toe in negotiations, we can run a business and be equals," Harbour noted, but how do women get into executive management, particularly on the dealer side, without wrench-turning experience? "It's an interesting task."

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the women interviewed for this story were either brought into the industry or guided along by important mentors, and the mentors in all cases—except one—were men.

These women may be the first generation of women executives in security, but they've been welcomed by men in the industry.

All of the women interviewed for the story believe the industry would benefit from having more women in the industry.

"I'm a big proponent of diversity," said Kerry Egan, "The more varied backgrounds and personalities, and more geographic diversity you have, the better. It allows us to better understand and serve our

customers. A more balanced and diverse management team will lead to greater success."

Egan is actively involved with the PBFAA efforts to extend licensing and apprenticeship programs. She also participates in high school career days. It's important, she said, to get out there and let young women know "you are an employer that has open doors ... that we want women in the industry." She believes more security providers and integra-

tors should make concerted efforts to recruit young women.

Women in Security Electronics was formed in 2004 to promote women in the security, but is currently inactive. The ASIS women's group, on the other hand, is active and currently working on a matching 60 mentors and mentorees. While ASIS membership tends to focus on the end-user community, women from the dealer side are welcome and encouraged to join, said Marene

Allison, VP of global security for Medco and a member of the advisory board.

Many women in security are involved in mentoring in a less formal way. Sarah Conley, director, physical security operations for Waste Management, works closely with a young woman who is WM's central station manager, Shanna Lopez. She makes an extra effort to include Lopez in "upper level discussions and events," though Conley said, "I like to think that in one way or another I act as a mentor for all the people who work for me, not just the women."

Bligh, of Provident Security, said Provident likes to hire "fresh, enthusiastic and motivated employees; in doing so we tend to be open to personality rather than gender."

Beth Tarnoff, of Stanley CSS, believes the entrance of more "Fortune 500 companies committed to the security industry" will translate into more opportunities for women. She's also working on an internship program "to get more young people, and young women specifically, to pursue careers in security." Tarnoff said she's received several awards for marketing, which she considers an honor. "I hope these industry awards inspire and motivate other women to pursue careers in our industry."

Simply seeing women in executive positions can be a powerful inspiration for younger women, as Lindsay Grauling learned recently. Grauling is VP of operations and the sole female executive at APX Alarm, the summer-model giant.

The males on the executive team started out as mentors to her, but she now counts them among her friends. At a large APX grand opening ceremony in December, she was the only woman on stage with a group of about 20 men. "Afterwards, several women from my staff came up to me and said how great it was to see a girl up there on stage. They said they were so proud to see their boss up there," Grauling said. "I had no idea it would mean that much to them," she said. "If I can be a role model or provide inspiration, I feel lucky."

Seeing diversity is important, not only for young women considering careers in security, but for relationships with employees and customers and, ultimately, for the health of a business. "Different personalities bring different talents and have different spheres of influence," said Sofia Aguilar, a partner and sales manager at A-1 Security Systems. "If everyone in your business looks like you, you're going to miss out as a business owner." **SSN**



Shandon Harbour

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