

# PARSING PSIM'S ADVANTAGES, AND COMPLEXITIES

by Bob Stockwell



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**T**he subject of physical security information management systems (PSIMs) has been a challenging one for integrators. The purpose of a PSIM is rooted in bringing in data from multiple standalone systems, including video, access control, intrusion and life safety to be analyzed, organized and presented to an operator with the context and format appropriate for a consistent response. Known as "situational awareness," this allows the operator to use the PSIM information to make decisions regarding an optimal critical events response. The PSIM can guide the operator through a defined response plan or standard operating procedure (SOP), and track all actions through to a resolution.

Security integrators can outline for existing and prospective customers many benefits of incorporating PSIM. For instance, having a single, user-friendly GUI can drastically decrease the amount of training needed for operators, when compared to the time to adequately train individuals on each subsystem. The enhanced GUI and functionality may also breathe new life into legacy systems, extending their usefulness and reducing costs, compared to a rip-and-replace. Embedding SOPs within the PSIM help to decrease operator response times and ensure that the correct processes are being followed for a given situation. Finally, the audit trail created from the consolidated events and operator responses can aid with compliance and potential future investigations.

## EXPLORE OPTIONS & SET PROPER EXPECTATIONS

The first consideration when contemplating PSIM is whether a traditional, full-fledged system is required or if your customer could be better served through other means. The once traditional access control and video management system (VMS) providers are advancing closer to offering a PSIM-like solution. While access control and video have been a common combination, today's providers for both applications are adding more integration partners in various areas, including intrusion, notification, building management and others. These systems can consolidate events and provide a single GUI for the operator, but may lack in complex data analysis and interactive response plans.

If PSIM is the best option, there are some things to watch out for during the scoping and deployment phases. Having a detailed scope or statement of work (SOW) is key. This will help set proper expectations and ensure all major players are on the same page. In turn, this will help establish guardrails to contain scope creep. The process of creating this document should be an iterative one involving all stakeholders and requires a deep dive into the customer's security operations and protocols.

Another area to pay close attention to in the early stages is which systems will be integrated into the PSIM, as well as the methods of integration and the functionality exposed within those methods. For example, if multiple video systems are being implemented, each will have its own software development kit (SDK) to facilitate the integration. One SDK may only allow

for the display of live video, while another may allow for live video, recorded video and alarm events. Understanding the limitations imposed by the various subsystems is imperative for an accurate scope.

## ONGOING SYSTEM MAINTENANCE, UPGRADES REQUIRED

Once the PSIM is deployed and operational, the work and planning don't stop. The customer will inevitably discover some areas to tweak, and perhaps identify new areas and situations where the PSIM can provide additional value through operator efficiency and process standardization. Planning is especially critical when upgrading not only the PSIM, but the underlying subsystems. For example, the customer may want to upgrade its VMS to gain some new functionality, support a new IP camera or engage the latest PC operating system. Beforehand, the integration method between the PSIM and the VMS should be evaluated to ensure compatibility. Is the new VMS software backward compatible, or will the PSIM integration piece need to be updated as well? This could require extensive software development and regression testing and should be factored into any schedules and potential costs.

Understanding your customer's needs and existing systems are the first steps to designing the right PSIM solution. By keeping in mind and planning for some of complexities that PSIM brings, integrators can ensure a successful deployment. **SSI**

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