AlarmBiller

Legends Security & Sound

Jim DeWitt is the president and owner of Legends Security and Sound based in Columbia, South Carolina. After completing his engineering degree and (in his words) begrudgingly accepting some sage career advice from Mom and Dad, he found himself smack-dab in the middle of the security industry—and it proved to be exactly where he belonged. He spoke with AlarmBiller about his company, and seven ways AlarmBiller has helped it:

What is your role at Legends Security and Sound?

I mainly focus on sales, marketing and the day-to-day tasks of the business from a big picture perspective. I'm at the point where I have folks I can delegate duties to—and AlarmBiller has really helped with that—so I don't feel like I have to be everywhere at the same time.

How did you get your start in this industry?

I graduated from the University of South Carolina with an electrical engineering degree. I got involved in the 12-volt industry (in a car, the voltage is 12, whereas in a house it's 120)—things with volts are a running theme here. In 1994, I started working with car alarms and stereos. I was doing these 12-volt systems in cars and having a good time. Quite honestly, the reason I left the industry was that my parents didn't see a future in it. They kind of forced me to try something different…well, not that I really listened to them—so it was more like strongly worded coercion, I guess. After that, I took a job in the security industry and started learning a lot. Eventually, I figured out I needed to get a license and join these industry associations in order for people to take me seriously enough to gain relevance. It was an investment of both time and money, but it's how I became who I am today.

How did Legends Security and Sound begin?

When I started the business, I was primarily doing residential security systems. Over the years, I became involved with Honeywell and kind of transformed into more of a commercial and residential systems integration guru. We typically work with the higher end residential group—that's kind of our primary focus now. But we really started evolving into that kind of company after we became a Honeywell dealer.

Tell us more about your work with Honeywell.

The Honeywell program promotes continuing education, and they only allow so many authorized dealers in a certain area. Think of it like Cadillac—they have lots of dealers, but there are only a few allowed per area. In the security industry, there are only two authorized Honeywell dealers in our market. It's like the crème de la crème. Once we got our foot in that door, we were really able

to grow.

What are some of the "x-factors" that make Legends Security and Sound special?

Well, we've always done things a lot differently than traditional security companies, I think. Like everybody else, we do a lot of automation—it's becoming a lot easier to do and a lot more people are doing it. The cool thing for us is we were doing it before it became plug-and-play, so to speak. That gave us a leg up. A cool example of one of the more unique things we're doing now is how we install sensors on a property. Before someone even gets to the door or steps on the porch, lights will be on. The customer may not even be home, but this stuff happens. Here at our office, we have speakers and cameras, and the automation alerts anyone who enters a restricted area.

What is your view on security and the best way to maintain it?

We look at security as an onion. The more layers an intruder has to peel back to get to the core, the better. Based on that philosophy, we start protecting our customers at the perimeter of the property and work backwards. We can't deter someone from coming onto the property, but we can make sure everyone knows they're there long before they reach the house.

Can you describe your relationship with your customers?

Well, we're a local, independently-owned company. For a business of our size, it's important that we focus on each of our clients individually. We don't look at them as a number. Coming from QuickBooks, the customers didn't have names – just account numbers, which made that relationship harder to establish. Now in AlarmBiller, they have names and notes and all their information is in one spot, so it's a lot easier to connect with them personally.

So, let's hear your "Top Seven" – the most beneficial things you believe AlarmBiller has done for your company:

1) Invoice Memo Magic

We just did a billing for January. Using AlarmBiller, we put a note in the memo section letting folks know that we offer cellular and internet monitoring services as well as cellular and video remote surveillance and reminding them to inquire if they were interested. We put it right on the bill, and the memo went out to every customer either electronically or in the mail.

2) RMR Through-the-Roof

When a customer switches from phone to cellular service, there's between a $15 and $20 per month increase in RMR. For some of my clients, that's a 70% increase, so it's been a pretty nice bump for us. We're actually getting a lot of people looking to switch or increase their services just from seeing the memo we sent out on the invoice in January. AlarmBiller also helped me find all our customers who had been paying $15 a month for using a landline and apply a $3 rate increase to that group

without interfering with other clients' rates. I love that I could do it in less than three minutes, and it generated about $1,300 of additional RMR per month because almost 425 people got the increase.

3) Security Specific Solutions Save the Day

When I would go to do rate increases, it used to take weeks because I'd have to do them one by one. If we tried to do that same $3 increase using QuickBooks instead of AlarmBiller, we would have had to sort through each account by hand to figure out which group of customers was only being billed $15 per month. Then, we would have to apply the increases to every account one at a time. With QuickBooks, we had to change the memorized transaction for every single month individually. For instance, I had memorized transactions for January through December, then a group that was quarterly, then a semi-annual group and an annual group. I used to have to go into each and every one and apply it by hand.

AlarmBiller's great because the program does all that for us. Maybe the biggest difference between the two is that QuickBooks is just a generic accounting program. We switched to AlarmBiller because it's specifically geared for the security industry, so it actually addresses the interests of people in the industry. It has fields that are customizable and specially designed for this type of business. QuickBooks just couldn't provide something like that.

4) Tech's Track Time

AlarmBiller has made work order scheduling a lot faster and helped us communicate better with techs in the field. All my guys have iPads with Verizon radios in them. They can be anywhere and get their work orders and schedules so they can easily confirm their appointments and let the customer know when they're headed to the site.

Lack of communication used to be a big issue for us. A lot of times, we'd set an appointment and ride out to the site, and then nobody was home. That's costly for us. Time is our biggest asset—sometimes I'd rather have more time than the money. With AlarmBiller, we're getting good at streamlining the way we operate to be more efficient.

As a matter of fact, one of our techs was just talking about how he's now able to plan his day on the job and figure out his schedule after work so that he can pick up his baby from daycare to make life a little easier on his wife.

5) Payment Processing Problems Solved

We used to use Intuit for credit card processing. We had a lot of people on Autopay with Intuit, and all that was great. But I can say that their processing fees were convoluted, so it was kind of hard to see what was going on. They supposedly had really good rates, but there were some big things I didn't like. For example, if somebody's card didn't go through, I wouldn't know until after we billed them and the money didn't come through. I wasn't able to troubleshoot, so the card would get declined and I'd have to handle everything after the fact.

Now, as soon as I log in to AlarmBiller, it shows me everything that's going on and alerts me when a customer's card is about to expire. As a matter of fact, the decrease in our collection period was really significant once we switched to AlarmBiller. With the Dashboard, we can see which sections of our business are most profitable, and I can see who has and hasn't paid.

6) Faster Payment, Greater Profit

Well, there's been a 25% decrease in the average time it takes people to pay their bills, so that's huge. Also, my profit margin has absolutely increased since switching to AlarmBiller. I can tell you just from an RMR standpoint there was a 30% increase in revenue just from that single rate increase we talked about before.

Our company bills 1,100 customers every month. I'll tell you that we're making a big push to go paperless and being able to store documents and contracts and easily find information for all those people right in AlarmBiller will save us even more time, and that's a good thing.

7) Little Companies Look Larger

One of the best things about AlarmBiller is that it allows a smaller company to appear much larger than they are – just with its features and technology. For example, the appointment confirmation emails to customers: on the day of the appointment, the client gets an email to confirm their service appointment. The biggest benefit has been how professional the email actually looks, as well as the fact that it lets both sides confirm the appointment right from their inbox. It also shows a picture of the tech who's assigned to the job. That's nice because the client can put a face to a name and feel more secure about a new person coming to their house.

The Customer Portal in AlarmBiller has also helped a lot of people pay their bills without having to call us and take up that time. We do still have a lot of people calling the office, but the longer we're on the software, the more people are starting to switch over for the whole convenience factor. At the end of the day, when people pay their bills online, it makes everything easier for both sides.

My biggest regret with AlarmBiller is that I didn't know about it sooner. I've referred…I don't even know how many people… five at least! I recently talked to somebody from Louisiana because he had questions, and I told him all the stuff I knew about AlarmBiller and the features I thought could help make his company better. Most of the people that I refer are affiliated with Honeywell, because we go to these conferences and I ask them, you know, "What are you doing now and what would you like to do better?" I've made a lot of connections that way, and I pass them along to you guys whenever possible."

Finally, do you have a great story to share about Legends Security and Sound?

Well, something pretty cool we did…I don't know if you're familiar with Antonio Sabato Jr. and his show "Fix It and Finish It"—but basically, they pick a family that needs help and redo one section of their house or outdoor space. Local contractors and volunteers all show up to pitch in to kind of help the family get back on its feet. Two years ago, we did a show with them to help a family here in Columbia. The couple had a small baby, and the husband had a degenerative eye disease causing him to go blind, so they were in a tough spot. We helped with a lot of AV-type things, but the biggest was taking out this huge, bulky entertainment system and putting in a flat screen TV and installing a speaker system in the ceiling. The whole experience was really rewarding… I mean…we try to be a legend around here!

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