

Astra Security

Security Dealer Adds Professionalism and Efficiency with New Management Software

When U.S. Air Force and Army veteran Oliver Keeling founded Astra Security, LLC in July 2013, he fulfilled a lifelong dream of owning his own business. He was also taking a huge risk by leaving the large national security company where he'd grown comfortable in his role as a local technician and plunging into what he calls a "sink or swim" situation.

As anyone who's ever started or seriously contemplated starting their own business knows, the going can be tough, particularly in the beginning. However, the roots of entrepreneurship run deep in Keeling's family – his father teaches on the subject at Iowa State University, and several relatives own and operate their own businesses. Keeling says he was fortunate to have this strong support system to help Astra get over the inevitable hurdles a fledgling business faces and become a successful operation.

After just over a year in business, Astra Security has grown tremendously, particularly since March, Keeling says. That's when the company abandoned its previous

customer management, billing, payment processing and inventory system – multiple systems, actually – and implemented AlarmBillr, a web-based management software solution designed to streamline invoicing, payment processing and work order management for security dealers of any size.

"For the first eight months in business, we had credit card processing but no inventory system or customer management software," Keeling says. "So, we were looking for a combination credit card processing solution with customer management software and inventory management system to track numbers, margins, the work we're doing from month to month."

Just how much the company has grown between March and August of this year is staggering. *"We've easily added thousands in profits, and our gross monthly profit has doubled," Keeling says. "At the time, I was very skeptical about spending the money, but in hindsight it was just a pinprick in our profits."*

So how has AlarmBiller contributed to this growth?

For starters, Keeling says the software combines the functions of what had previously been several separate systems into one convenient system that's easy to use and operate.

In the past Keeling would find himself with downtime at various points throughout the day. With AlarmBiller, he says he's able to fill downtime that had previously been a drain on the business with activities that will generate profits. When Keeling or another security consultant enter leads into the AlarmBiller system, they create a proposal and a work order for an on-site consultation with the customer or potential customer.

Best of all, Keeling says, AlarmBiller allows him to review and follow up on leads from anywhere, at any time – something he does with whatever downtime he has in a particular day. *“It gives us a way to funnel accountability and figure out how to take leads and prospects and funnel them into customers. With AlarmBiller, I could be anywhere on my phone, prospecting, or looking at the company’s overall numbers,”* he says. *“It enables us to do more work and because it doesn’t sit on the network, we can easily fill downtime.”*

AlarmBiller offers a number of features, including professionally designed documents and a built-in web portal for customers to pay their bills, sign up for auto pay or create services requests. Keeling says these and other AlarmBiller features help him avoid the stigma that's often attached to small companies.

“It’s awesome that this is all cloud-based, because if a technician says to a customer or a prospect, ‘I’ll send you something when I’m back at the office,’ that’s the worst close in history. With AlarmBiller, we can be standing in front of them with all the numbers in a professional-looking document and a pen. That’s why we close 70 to 80 percent of our customers,” he says. *“Thanks to AlarmBiller, I don’t deal with the perception that I’m a guy doing this out of my garage.”*

Because the system can be entirely automated, Keeling says AlarmBiller is a great alternative to incurring the expense of hiring a full-time employee just to manage invoicing and billing. *“AlarmBiller automatically processes all our recurring invoices each month, and then we get an email listing each payment that was processed and which payments were declined,”* he says. *“I could go on vacation for six months and not lift a finger – AlarmBiller does all the work.”*

In some cases, customers request quarterly rather than monthly invoices, which is something Keeling would have struggled to provide in the past. *“How would I even do that? I have no clue how to even track that,”* he says. With AlarmBiller, he doesn't give it a second thought.

Given the success Astra Security has had using AlarmBiller, Keeling would recommend the solution to other security companies, particularly those that may be resistant to change. *“For a lot of companies, especially companies that have done something one way for 10 years or so, change is not easy. But it can really help if you’re willing to take that step,”* he says.



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