Downsizing of security
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Like it or not, security will inevitably be cut during a recession. Knowing your risks and liability vulnerabilities in advance by conducting a meaningful Security Assessment/Security Survey is recommended by the author.

As we watch the news daily we see that companies all across the world are downsizing due to the recession. There has not been an industry that has not been affected in some way, shape, or form. However, when times get tough, is it a wise decision to reduce security? It depends who you talk to as to what answer you will get.

As most security professionals know, security operations are often looked at as a hit to the bottom line. In most cases security does not generate revenue, and their expenses can be quite high. So when the budget office starts to look at cuts, security can be high on that list.

In the past while talking to a Chief Operating Officer at a medium size medical center, he commented to me that he could not understand why his organization spent so much money on security, when in fact, according to him, the hospital did not have any substantial security concerns. As we discussed his comments, he came to realize that he did not
have a higher risk of security incidents because he invested in security. That reminds me of the old adage: you get what you pay for. Pay very little and you will receive very little results. That does not mean that there will ever be an endless flow of funds for security. On the contrary, we need to manage our resources and fund the appropriate security measures. It comes down to do more with less, be efficient.

THE RECESSION PARADOX: CUTTING SECURITY WHEN MORE SECURITY IS NEEDED

During the current global recession, security is not exempt from budget cuts. With every industry looking at riding out the storm, they are making cuts in all areas. However, in a January 2009 survey conducted by ASIS International, it was found that a majority of security professionals have noticed an increase in security services and needs. In addition to that survey, one only has to watch the evening news to see the rise in violent crimes being committed at places of worship, healthcare/long-term facilities, and other locations. The recession is causing people, who might otherwise be rational in their behavior, to act out from stress. So why then would an organization consider reducing their security? It is all about money.

KNOW YOUR RISKS BEFORE YOU CUT

Since the reductions are coming, and if we agree with them or not, managing the reduction is the number one factor. If you are looking to make cuts, it would be wise to know your risks, and what increased liability you might cause.

Risks or vulnerabilities can be identified with a professionally conducted Security Assessment/Security Survey. Although there may be in-house security that does not always mean that someone on that team is qualified to conduct the survey. There have been numerous discussions on whether or not a survey should be done in-house, or to bring in a professional consultant. The answer to that question is not black and white. You have to consider the qualifications of both. The bottom line is that you want to know what your risks are; can you manage them with a reduced security presence; how do you manage your
risks; or can you just defer or share your exposure with other resources such as insurance or contract guard companies.

I have been contacted by businesses that wanted me to review their security operations to see where they could make changes to realize efficiencies or cost savings. When asked if they have performed a security survey/assessment in the recent past, they responded, “No, we will probably do that later.” Do you reduce services without knowing what your risks are now, or what they will be once you make cuts? What will happen when your security presence is reduced? What additional risks will develop?

As you or your organization ponder the thought of reductions, it would be wise to consider what the end result will look like. Remember, it is always better to know beforehand, than to have some attorney point out the increased liabilities later.