

By VAWN HIMMELSBACH

TAKING AIM at REMOTE SECURITY

Say goodbye to phone lines and AC power with a solution that will reach places traditional security can't touch

At construction sites and remote areas without power or phone lines, security has always been an issue. The latest technology to address this problem is a wireless security system that doesn't require phone lines or hard-wired AC power, called AIM Site Security and Notification System, from Armstrong's Intelligent Monitoring Systems. It's designed specifically for applications that traditional security can't service, including seasonal sites such as cottages, cargo trailers, construction sites, new home construction, boats and RVs.

"When we took a look at it, we didn't know

what applications it would work for until all of a sudden things started popping up," says Ray Summers, president and general manager of Canadian National Security Ltd. in Winnipeg, which has been selling the AIM product for about a year.

One of its clients provides raw materials for concrete and building materials across Canada. At the aggregate facility — a large multi-million dollar automated plant that dredges gravel and sand out of a large pit and separates the particulate using a conveyor system — the main control tower has always been a security issue.

"This is a seasonal business in that they can't run the plant in the winter time and it's very expensive to keep the power on," he says. Once things start to

freeze, they turn everything off. But with no power, they couldn't protect the facility, especially the control building which houses computers and control equipment.

So they installed the AIM product, initially using the self-contained battery power source, and now using a solar panel to keep it charged up. "As long as we've got that solar panel, even if it gets to -35 or -40 everything is still working 100 per cent," says Summers. The client had tried other solutions over the years, including large solar panels with batteries, but these panels would get covered up with snow and wouldn't charge properly.

The dealer also installed the AIM product at a remote Chrysler dealership in a small township north



Photos by Thomas Fricke

of Winnipeg, which sells quads and snowmobiles. “They’ve had some break-ins on the compound,” says Summers, “so it made sense to install AIM, which doesn’t require power or phone lines.”

Within 60 seconds of an incident, AIM will notify end-users through direct dial or text messaging, or it can be set up to include operator notification. AIM uses the Rogers Network to send data.

“The bulk of my business is CCTV, both analogue and IP systems,” says Summers. “There is a hole where we have power issues, and they’re usually remote areas or areas outside of the city.” The only issue he’s had so far is that AIM uses cellular towers, so if you’re in an area far north where there’s no cell coverage, it can be a problem. However, even if your cellphone doesn’t

work, it doesn’t necessarily mean you won’t be able to use the product, because you’re only sending data, so you don’t need the same voice-quality reception.

Ed Russell, who runs Russell Protective Services in Canmore, Alta., provides security for a specialty custom homebuilder (its last house was priced at \$11 million), which was hit with a robbery on one of its job sites. The homebuilder lost \$10,000 worth of tools. Before, there wasn’t anything on the market that could deal with this type of scenario. “There’s no phone lines and really sketchy power,” says Russell. “At the time we had nothing.”

One day Russell came across an ad for AIM; now he’s using it with construction clients. “With a little bit of help from [Armstrong’s] technical department we’ve

got these set up for every eventuality short of a missile attack,” he says.

Canmore is a boomtown, and along with that is seeing an increase in crime. Russell used to run a guard agency, but had to let it go because he couldn’t keep it staffed. “You can’t hire a trained monkey right now,” he says. In Alberta, where labour is in short supply, it can cost \$500 a night to hire a security guard. So for clients that can’t find security guards, this is another way to mitigate the problem. “This fills in holes around our work,” he said. “It’s almost creating its own workload.” It could also reduce the number

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of security guards needed, or alert a guard if there’s a breach he can’t see from his guard area.

Clients are getting about nine weeks out of the battery before it has to be charged (it sends you a message when the battery is low, but still provides six days before it goes into shutdown). But Russell doesn’t encourage customers to rely on text messaging for alarm notification, but rather direct dialing, since the cellular network in that area can be unreliable.

At construction sites, typically there’s no power on a 24-hour basis. “[With AIM] you can have almost instant communication and instant security and not have to worry about power requirements for a month,” says Gerald O’Hara, general manager of Carlow Security Services in Dartmouth, N.S., which has been in business for 30 years in commercial and residential security. The dealer has installed AIM units in several construction sites. “We’re expanding into this area as a result of AIM,” he says. “We see this as the next generation as far as portability is concerned.”

It’s not just for burglaries, he adds. It has other



» Taking aim at remote security



applications, such as smoke and fire detection. It can be used in conjunction with almost any conceivable device, such as containers carrying expensive products.

"It is a specialty product, no question," says O'Hara. "You're not going to find it in the average house or office, but you'll find it out in the middle of the woods with certain types of sensors on it."

The product is being used for purposes the company never anticipated, says Dan Small, general manager of Armstrong. "The dealers have found a lot more uses for this product." In one case, the owner of an apartment building was having problems when tenants moved out — people would go into the empty apartment to party and drink and smoke. So he now uses the AIM unit in vacant apartments, which sends a message to the supervisor if anyone goes in.

There's a tender on hold in Newfoundland from the Department of Natural Resources for an electronic probe that would run across a roadway to detect poachers. "Unfortunately in Newfoundland they don't have GSM coverage, and that's

what our entire industry has gone to," says Small. "No one is using CDMA anymore." This is a problem for Newfoundland, in particular, but the next version of AIM will include satellite communications to deal with those types of issues.

The RCMP is also looking into it for marijuana grow-ops, so they can catch people during harvesting, says Gary Armstrong, president of Armstrong. And insurance companies are starting to use it on a small scale. If a home burns down in the middle of the night, the insurance company usually hires a security firm to stay there, but now some of them are using the AIM unit instead. Armstrong is also rolling out a GPS version, so clients will be able to track vehicles, from stolen ski-doods to Harleys.

Armstrong has about 250 dealers that have been exposed to the product. But it's also gone into secondary markets, where it's bringing non-traditional security people into the fold. In one case, it's working with the owner of a marina in Victoria who will offer the AIM unit to boat-owners.

"We're still trying to sell to traditional security dealers, but overall they're so busy and so short-staffed, to even present them with something else to make them more money, they haven't got enough time in the day," says Small. "If we're going to do serious volume, we have to get outside of the traditional security market." Also, dealers don't have to be monitored with Armstrong.

Everything built into it comes from an understanding of the security industry. "Other products on the market send directly from the unit to the customer, but don't go through a central station," he says. "Ours provides that everything is documented so you have online access to every test signal, every alarm." It can be held for police records and is fully accessible by the end-user over Internet access, he adds.

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