

Unruly Crowds: The “Equal Opportunity” Security Threat



With summer in full swing, security professionals turn their thoughts to juggling staff's vacation schedules, storm protocols, and...crowd control?

With the NATO summit held in Chicago in May 2012, and the national political conventions in Charlotte and Tampa, local Pinkerton offices worked with clients for months to develop plans and strategies.

But the advent of flash mobs and the rise of the Occupy movement means that your city no longer needs to host a summit or convention — or be home to a championship sports team — to experience the unique security issues created by the masses. So regardless of your location or business, it's wise to be prepared.

What You Can Do

If you expect your business or employees to be in the path of a protest, preparation is key. When developing your crowd control protocol, consider the following action items as starting points:

- 1. Develop appropriate reporting procedures and train your staff to use them.** Your staff members are your first line of surveillance; they need to be observant, vigilant, and know when to call the proper authorities.
- 2. Consider additional surveillance, specifically CCTV outside the premises and panic alarms within employees' reach.** Such tools are especially important for retail and street-level businesses.
- 3. Tighten building access.** A common Occupy tactic is to create a scene on a tenant floor. Check that your loading dock is monitored, doors are locked and prepare to lock down your building if necessary.
- 4. Remember that certain types of businesses are often targets.** Increase security measures if your business is near any major financial services, law and lobby firms, or mortgage processing offices. The Occupy movement tends to target such businesses, making neighboring properties vulnerable to risk. Hotels and convention centers, especially ones hosting black-tie or charity events that attract celebrities and industry leaders, are also targets. Expect protesters out in force.
- 5. Consider limiting your building population to essential employees.** While tenant leases may prevent office buildings from closing down entirely, send workers to a satellite office or have them work from home if possible.
- 6. Expect employees to have commuting challenges and normal amenities to be disrupted.** Develop back-up plans for those stuck in the commute. Suggest that employees who need to be on site pack a lunch.
- 7. Review what is outside your building.** Outdoor café seating might be stowed for the duration.

8. **Run standard fire and life safety drills.** Make sure staff and tenants know what to do in an emergency. Designate alternate entrances in case you need to close the main lobby.
9. **Consider forming an alliance with neighboring businesses.** Having a network of eyes and ears in the vicinity may give you advance warning if a mob is in the area.
10. **Keep in mind that your ultimate goal is to ensure security.** As a director of for Pinkerton points out, "We don't go in to take on the protesters; we focus on helping to keep our clients away from harm."

Social Media Plays a Growing Role in Society

The rise of social media has revolutionized the way protests and flash mobs are both organized and publicized, from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street. Plans are publicized on Twitter and Foursquare; moments are captured and broadcast in an instant on YouTube.

"All you have to do is look at what's happening in the world and see the role social media has played. In fact, the Moldovan Revolution in 2009 was called the "Twitter Revolution,"" notes the director. "In the security industry, we have to understand it and use it to our

advantage." Every organization, he says, needs to monitor social media.

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The good news is that properly monitored, social media can provide security experts with an early heads-up and the chance to prepare. Flash mobs and even the Occupy movement tend to have very poor operational security; all the details of their activities are readily available, often on social media. The director recalls one case in which demonstrators released the home address of a client's CEO on social media. "We were able to warn the CEO, make family changes, and be on-site as the protesters arrived."



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