

Meet the installer

Security life with David Armstrong of Centurion Fire & Security in Huddersfield

What would be a typical project for you?

We stopped working in domestic security about 30 years ago because there were too many low cost systems being fitted by unqualified engineers in the market. So we started to focus on commercial installations and that was the best decision we've ever made as a business. Commercial security systems need maintenance contracts and monitoring for insurance cover with very little fall-off rate. While with domestic installations it was a much higher drop out rate for people to cancel their maintenance contract. Currently we are most active with fire contracts, followed by CCTV, access and intruder in that order. This might be because the intruder alarm side of things has become very competitive in terms of price; however we have accumulated a lot of intruder alarm maintenance contracts over the years which keeps us fairly busy!

Do you have any 'go to' technology?

We have multi-skilled engineers working in all four major disciplines and the only way you can do that is to restrict your product range to what they are trained on. For the past thirty years we have fitted Galaxy panels but from the start of this year we've favoured Texecom technology. The main reason for this decision was that the upload/download capabilities are all in the cloud with the Texecom systems unlike previous systems that required a separate SQL server. The app is also really good and has a lot of features including remote resetting and all the stats that customers like. For access systems we use Paxton for installations of up to 1,000 doors and an American company called DSX for larger contracts of 1000+ doors. In terms of CCTV we've used lots of different systems over the years but today we mainly use Hikvision because of the benefits of the in-built analytics. For example, in a recent perimeter security installation for 22 Builders' merchants sites we didn't use a single PIR, the whole thing was put together using Hikvision AI enabled video analytics which can filter out false alarms and then checked again via Calipsa at our monitoring station. Finally for fire we use C-TEC, again because of the cloud enabled upload/download features. We are currently an evaluation site for the C-TEC CAST platform. We are also an accredited Milestone CCTV installer.

What is the best thing about working in security?

You'll never be out of work. Also I like that fact that the technology changes and evolves – this is



Name: David Armstrong

Job title: Managing Director

Time in security/fire: I started in 1974 so that's 46 years!

Company: Centurion Fire & Security

Location: Huddersfield

Areas of expertise: CCTV, intruder, access control and fire for commercial premises applications

Accreditations: NSI Gold, BAFE

a very innovative industry and I don't think many people recognise that. It's also great that we can work with manufacturers to help develop new technologies.

Is third party accreditation beneficial to you?

Most certainly – without it we would be seen to be no better than "a man with a van". Accreditations maintain the standard of the industry at a high level and also make it a level playing for competition. As well as the NSI Gold (since 1984), we have been BAFE approved for fire systems for the last five years. Without a doubt, third party approval has helped us when it comes to tendering for new projects.

Do you think there is a skills shortage in the industry? Any trouble recruiting?

Finding a good, experienced multi-skilled engineer is like looking for hen's teeth! We pay good rates, but if the people aren't available, then they are not available. Last year we started three new engineering apprentices which includes for the first time a young girl, called Hannah. She's only 16 but she is working really well, loves her job and has a great work ethic.

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Are there any common requests from customers that give you problems?

Over the years we have learned to eliminate the common problems that we used to see. For example with upload/download if a customer rings in, we have trained all of the staff here, even those who are office based admin people, so that they can initiate a remote diagnostic test if no engineers are available, meaning that we can have the logs downloaded and ready for checking.

What is the security industry’s biggest myth?

The biggest myth with CCTV is that people often over expect what cameras can do. Quite often we find that customers think that one camera can recognise a person in one area and read a number plate somewhere else at the same time. This can lead people to thinking that they can get away with having fewer cameras than what they really need.

What impact has smart/home automation had on your business?

Fortunately, working exclusively in the commercial market we’ve not been affected at all by the unregulated DIY security technology trend of the last few years. I think it has probably made some members of the public more aware of security systems, but it has not reached the commercial side of the industry.

What would make your job easier?

Having access to more skilled engineers would be a start! I’m really lucky in that we have such a great management team here, so I’ve recently been able to cut down my working hours to three days a week. They have certainly helped make my job easier.

What is your ultimate/fantasy electronic security/fire product?

More user friendly products would be my fantasy.

Manufacturers have done a pretty good job of developing products that meet all the demands of the industry as it has evolved but sometimes neglect the end users. However there are some exceptions C-TEC’s new CAST products are ideal for fire applications and the new firmware in the Texecom Elite panels is getting better all the time. Maybe more could be done with access control – I’m always really impressed with the wireless systems they have in modern Hotels and perhaps there needs to be more development in our industry to speed up installation time and reduce cost.

What advice would you give to a younger version of yourself?

When I left school at 15 my Dad said to me: “Whatever job you do Son, make sure you enjoy doing it because you’ll be doing it for a long time” and that’s the advice I would give myself - if Dad hadn’t said it first. I’m also a firm believer that no matter what job you do, if you work hard and put the hours in, you can make a success of it. I used to drive home from work in my old van and see big new Jaguar cars parked outside pubs and think: “Why can’t I drive a car like that and have an early finish?” But it’s only through hard work that you get to that position, which you can do if you apply yourself persistently.

Will England ever win the football World Cup again?

I doubt it, but then I don’t follow football!

If you won £25,000 what would you do with the money?

We have a profit sharing scheme here for the staff so I might put some money into that. We also work with a local children’s Hospice so I would definitely do something with them, perhaps buying them a child-sized Tesla electric car to play with.