TIME TO CHANGE SECURITY FOR THE BETTER

Stephen Cooper OBE, COO of Apstec Systems calls for the adoption of low contact screening tech

High throughput and low contact security screening systems have been on the market for a few years now. These disruptive technologies offer opportunities not only to do things differently but also more effectively and more efficiently. However, in a highly conservative industry like security, change rarely comes quickly, unless there is a compelling driver. In the context of securing crowded places from terrorist attack and the need for security screening, the driver appears to have arrived in the shape of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Traditional security measures - such as walk-through metal detectors, baggage x-ray and physical person and bag searches - have been the go-to approaches for screening to protect venues and public spaces for some time. Introduced in the face of a global rise in terrorist attacks and the targeting of public places in the late 1990s and early 2000s, these approaches were drawn largely from aviation security and rapidly deployed in the absence of other suitable technology and in light of the imminent terrorist threat. They were never designed for protecting crowded places and are an ill fit for that purpose. Specifically, traditional approaches are slow and expensive, a poor experience for the user and generate secondary queues vulnerable to attack. It was widely acknowledged that things needed to change well before the arrival of Coronavirus.

Urgent requirement

However, the pandemic brought the health risks of high contact and high-density traditional security into sharp focus. Throughout the length and breadth of public transport networks, studies determined that security checkpoints pose the highest risk of transmitting infectious diseases. If this wasn't concerning enough, male security guards were found to have the highest mortality rates from COVID-19 of all male occupations. It was clear that something needed to be done.

All of a sudden, low contact, high footfall screening systems - removing the need for people to divest, allowing social distancing and the free flow of people through the security process - address an urgent requirement. At the heart of this is the need to deliver security safely and with health risk mitigation in mind. Future risk assessments and operational requirements will need to focus on health as well as security. Whilst the figures are not directly comparable and without acknowledging the complexities of terrorism, it is worth reflecting on the fact that in the last 12 months or so over 2.4 million people have died from Coronavirus compared to an average annual global death rate from terrorism over the last ten years of approximately 20,000. This fact should be reflected in a proportionate and balanced response to security, delivered with health risk mitigation in mind.

That traditional security screening is so at odds with the principles of infection control and security staff are at such high risk of serious illness or death should be justification enough to move on to low contact screening. However, there are other drivers more directly related to business and its continuity in the face of a pandemic, present or future.

Poor preparation

One of the reasons governments had tough decisions to make and businesses have suffered is that we were poorly prepared in 2020. This is despite global pandemics topping the list in many national risk registers for the last decade. We've been hit by pandemics in the past, some well before the arrival of international travel as we know it today. There's little doubt that pandemics will remain a real risk for the foreseeable future. With this experience behind us and an uncertain future ahead, it's now time to better prepare.

If businesses want to avoid the disruption seen in the last 12 months, they must demonstrate that they can manage health risks effectively; securing venues safely will be a significant element.

Businesses adopting high throughput and low contact screening technologies are well placed to satisfy the authorities that the conditions have been set to safely screen in a way that is sensitive to health risks. Not only should this significantly enhance the prospects for businesses to open in the event of an ongoing health crisis but also make them more resilient to an emerging pandemic.

Some businesses are already putting low contact technology in place, demonstrating to government, local authorities and customers that health risks are under control and venues can open safely. Of course, the public will need reassurance too and will want evidence it is safe to return to busy public places. Low contact systems will help provide that reassurance whilst offering the public a much-improved experience over traditional security.

Adopting high throughput and low contact screening systems can: deny terrorists the opportunity to attack vulnerable queues; improve the experience for the user; make significant savings compared to traditional security; automate the screening process to minimise human error; and critically, in light of our experiences of the last 12 months, reduce health risks and save lives.

Given that traditional security checkpoints are known to spread disease and put lives at risk and that low contact systems that mitigate the health risks are now widely available, there may also be a duty of care to consider. Even if that's not the case, security's certainly in a better position to make a significant contribution to the resilience and bottom line of the business than ever before, whilst saving lives in the process. There is no doubt, now is the time to adopt low contact screening technology.

CASE STUDY: KOELNMESSE, GERMANY

Leading exhibition centre Koelnmesse organises and conducts internationally renowned trade fairs, exhibitions and special events in Cologne. Its security department was seeking improvements to the location's security and visitor experience - and in light of the Coronavirus pandemic, there was a strong desire to move away from traditional high contact security checkpoints.

After a rigorous pilot project to test Apstec's Human Security Radar, Koelnmesse decided to procure and deploy the system to provide high-throughput, low-contact security screening.

Herbert Marner, Chief Financial Officer of Koelnmesse said: "Apstec's innovative HSR system with its low contact approach is one important element of our #B-SAFE4business efforts to ensure professional safety at the highest level, while creating an environment in which the spirit of encounter and business can thrive once again."