

The Cambridge Model: A Networked Approach to Retail Security

By Jon Miller

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Networks are reshaping 21st century business, and retail security is no exception.

Cambridge Security Services pioneered the network approach starting in the 1990s when the company began expanding its reach not by opening regional offices, but by carefully building a network of trusted affiliates across North America. Today, Cambridge has the most extensive network of security personnel in the country—some 650 security companies throughout the continental US, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Canada, including approximately 3,500 off-duty police officers.

In the process Cambridge has amassed a huge amount of information about each potential subcontractor—what each is best at, which regions it can service, and most importantly, how reliably each performs. Many firms have been rejected when they failed to measure up to the

the more willing they are to negotiate on price. This is key to making the Cambridge model work. Lower affiliate rates enable Cambridge to offer clients a one-stop shop for all their security needs, anywhere in North America, and still keep prices competitive.

Building a Network

Over the years Cambridge has taken two important steps to ensure the long-term success of its networked model. First, the company developed a proprietary database called data source intervention (DSI) that gives Cambridge instant access to all the information it gathers about its affiliates. At the same time the company also created a national command center from which it could direct, coordinate, and monitor all active projects anywhere in the country, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.



high standards Cambridge demands. But many more have proved that they can be counted on to respond quickly and professionally.

Companies that make the grade have seen just how significant the Cambridge business can be. Much of the work may be temporary—store openings and closings, renovation projects, emergencies of all sorts—but by the end of the year, the Cambridge assignments add up, frequently becoming a significant part of an affiliate's business.

And the more that affiliates come to rely on Cambridge assignments and profit from the relationship,

In 2012 the command center and corporate headquarters were brought together in a new, state-of-the-art facility designed to function without interruption even in the event of natural or man-made disasters.

With these resources in place, Cambridge can respond promptly to requests from retailers anywhere in the country. Within minutes of a client call, an affiliate selected from the database receives a work order specifying every detail of the assignment. Once the work begins, the command center monitors the affiliate's performance in real time. And when the situation warrants it, Cambridge sends key executives to personally supervise the work on site.



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“It’s worth it to us to fly our top people out there,” said Senior Vice President David Malefsky, “to guarantee that our clients are getting the service they require.”

Donald Horan of Gordon Brothers Group is one of the company’s satisfied customers. “Cambridge Security is a proven resource for rapid-response, short-term needs, as well as sustained service engagements,” he said. “The infrastructure and oversight they bring to a project, combined with their versatility of service offerings, is unrivaled in the business today.”

Serving Most Retailers

Cambridge now serves most of the retailers in the country. It didn’t take long before some of the major national security companies began contracting with Cambridge to handle jobs for their retail clients. Limited to locations where they have offices and burdened by the overhead of maintaining those offices, the national

companies know that they cannot profitably serve all their clients’ needs in every location, especially for short-term or emergency work. Cambridge offers an attractive solution.

Having worked in loss prevention for some of the country’s leading retailers, including Loehmann’s, Foot Locker, Staples, Filene’s and A&P, Paul Lunt, president of Beacon One Group, calls Cambridge “a reliable business partner.”

“Cambridge has provided emergency and permanent guard coverage nationally at my locations,” said Lunt. “I’ve relied on Cambridge to provide special events coverage at all my national events. I found their team to be very professional and committed to customer service.”

Malefsky estimates that Cambridge now serves a majority of the country’s major retailers, either directly as clients or indirectly through other security companies. Often the retailer doesn’t even know that Cambridge is handling the job because the guards who do the work are not wearing Cambridge insignia. But those guards have been assigned by Cambridge, are following the instructions Cambridge gives them, and stay in constant touch with Cambridge throughout the assignment.

“The retailers are pleased because they’re getting the high-quality security they want,” explained Cambridge President Stanley J. Czwakiel. “The national security companies are pleased because they’re able to meet their clients’ needs simply and efficiently. And we’re pleased because we’ve proven that there’s a better way to provide quality security at an affordable price anywhere in the country.” ■

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