



## **Larry Dolin of American Security Systems is committed to growth and excellence**

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How did Larry Dolin, an MBA from Syracuse and bachelor of Journalism from the University of Missouri, end up as the president and co-founder of American Security Systems? He started as an assistant account executive on package goods products at Benton and Bowles, moving up the ranks to executive vice president at a medium size agency, DKG Advertising. It was at this point, that his "entrepreneurial urge" was kicking in. "My function in the advertising business was to work with clients on the total marketing of their products, and I felt like I would get more enjoyment on the client side."

The moment came in 1979 when his agency was pitching ADT, the world's largest security company. The more he looked at the industry, the more he realized it represented an opportunity. It was, and still is to some degree, very fragmented with a few large nationals and several major regional's controlling 75% of the business. The rest of the business was made up of thousands of small to medium companies. What seemed to be lacking was a high degree of professionalism, and of marketing. He put together a prospectus for the creation of a new alarm company, American Security Systems. He says, "Fate played a major part in the company coming to reality." He had just come off a motorcycle accident and limping into the agency one day, for some reason picked up a Wall Street Journal, a newspaper he rarely read. On the cover was an article about Time Life (way before Time Warner) starting a new venture capital group? He sent the prospectus to them, and 3 days later got a call from Henry Luce III, asking for an appointment. "Hank liked my vision from the onset," Dolin said, but said the project would be too small for Time Life but "would it be acceptable if he invested personally?" This began a 25 year partnership and friendship, which ended a couple of years ago with Luce's death. "Hank was the perfect partner," said Dolin. Initially, he invested money, then gave moral support.

January, 1980, Dolin started in a 400 s/f office in London Terrace on West 23rd with one man, one van and a secretary. Using his marketing background, he developed a residential product line built around a wireless alarm system called the Home Defender. Realizing he needed to make a quick impact, he chose radio advertising as the medium of choice, and classical stations because of their high income, education demographics. "I sold 250 alarm systems in one year," working from 7 in the morning, and rolling back home at 10 p.m. after one to two evening sales appointments. Divorced at the time, Dolin would often take his two sons on sales calls on Saturday, before heading off to the beach.

"Success in this business is being able to get passed a series of evolutionary hurdles," said Dolin. "Once you start making money, you get to a point where you have to add personnel and departments, which take you back financially to ground zero. A separate service department is critical for growth, since customers refuse to wait until you can pull an installer off a job to get to

them. "This is what separates the men from the boys in the industry."

#### Acquisitions/Fire Systems

"If I had it all to do over again, I would have looked for an acquisition from the start," said Dolin. "It would have provided a platform of knowledge, a customer base and an infrastructure, rather than learning everything from scratch." In 1985, Dolin bought its cross town rival Rem Security, and moved into their headquarters on East 20th St. This immediately expanded American's line of products, since they were also in the commercial alarm, CCTV, retail lock and intercom business. Since that time, American has bought 6 other alarm companies, most recently Scott Security. Consolidation makes sense for both, since American has the infrastructure to handle their customer base, and they are often hitting the hurdles inherent in this business. Many of American's key employees came from these merges. In one instance, the acquisition of Electrical Wiring Solutions brought in one of the top experts in NYC coded fire alarms, Steve Wasserman, a Nicet Level IV manager. In the last five years American's fire division has grown 1000%. "We now have installed and/or are servicing fire systems for clients like Forbes, the Catholic Archdiocese, FECS, and Central Synagogue. We now interpret and provide CAD drawings, with our own plodder and printer."

#### Public Sector

In the '90s, Dolin recognized that there was a growth opportunity in the public sector. Specifically there were many NYCHA telephone entry RFP bids. American was successful in winning many of these bids, installing systems in over 700 buildings in NYC. As important, American has maintained this relationship with NYCHA, winning ongoing service contracts to service these and more buildings over the years. American in effect runs a separate Public Sector division. More recently, "We won a 3 year contract to test and inspect the fire alarms for all the NYCHA buildings, a central station monitoring contract for all NYC Dept. of Mental Health locations, and are bidding and winning projects in Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester counties." The NYC School Construction Authority is our next target, as schools are renovated/built, with fire alarms and other security systems in the plans. "Success and real growth in this industry comes with a mixture of business in the public and private sectors." The skill set is basically the same, and the infrastructure supports both entities.

#### Access Control/CCTV

"In my wildest dreams, I never imagined the growth of access control and CCTV." Currently these two categories of products account for 60% of all new installations for American. "We recently finished a 300 door card access installation for the New School University, integrating all CCTV and alarms on one software platform." This is the future, controlling access for all types of buildings, and using CCTV as a deterrent and to capture events for prosecution. Biometric readers are also on the rise. The beauty of access control is owners can decide who goes where, and at what time. All events are logged, so should something happen, the customer can go back and see who entered. Regarding CCTV, the advent of digital video recorders has changed the industry. Camera systems can be viewed over local networks or on the Internet, from anywhere. Customers are using these systems as management tools, as well as for security.

#### Video Doorman

Dolin's newest project is the introduction of the Video Doorman tm. This system performs the same function of a real doorman, at a fraction of the cost. By employing an outside Siedle panel with a camera built in, a delivery can be made to a tenant when they're at work. The signal, along with the picture is transmitted to American's Central Station, where an operator talks to the delivery person,

and after viewing proper identification, remotely lets him in, escorts him to a package room, lets him in, escorts him out, and notifies the tenant via e-mail there's a package waiting for them. Everything is recorded, and tenants use American's card access system to enter both the front and package room door. American can "escort" a tenant into the building late at night as well, using the same system. Should someone follow a tenant in, he's warned, and if necessary the police are dispatched.

#### New Headquarters

Two years ago American sold its building on 18 West 23rd St., and purchased a 10,000 s/f building in Long Island City. "It's a perfect contractor building, with operations/inventory downstairs, executive offices/showroom upstairs and its 5 minutes from the city.

#### Personal

Dolin is married to his wife Sophie, with a 9 year old daughter Blake. They live in Sands Point, N.Y., where he is involved in local community events. Dolin golf's, plays tennis, loves to travel, is a member of ASIS, the NYBFA and National Burglar and Fire Alarm Association, served on the Board of Directors of the Executive Association of Greater New York, and is a member of the Nassau County Police Reserves.

#### The Future

"I see continued growth for American Security Systems in the residential multiple dwelling and commercial markets, as well as the public sector," said Dolin. "We will focus on quality products, installations, and service." Currently, American is the 65th largest alarm company in the United States, and in the top 5 in New York with over 8,000 customers. "We get stronger, because we're committed to growth and excellence."