

## What End Users Should Reasonably Expect

By: Robert D. Grossman

Despite the best of intentions, there is often a “disconnect” between the people who design, manufacture, distribute, sell, and install electronic security products, and those who specify, purchase and use them. As someone who has spent roughly equal amounts of time on both sides of the chasm, I will do my best to help bridge that gap by way of this column.

At one point in a conversation, as these two groups try to come together, you will usually hear a phrase such as, “I don’t know if I’m asking too much” or “If it’s not unreasonable ...” While it is important to assert yourself and protect the interests of your organization, we are also aware of the need for a “win-win” solution to our problem so we’re not written off as a pest by the people we deal with. In this spirit, I have set some common ground in this first column by defining some expectations folks on either side of the divide can reasonably agree upon.

### What Is and Is Not Reasonable

**Reasonable:** The product should work as specified. This means every feature promised in a manual, specification sheet or other form of written documentation — even the back of a napkin or an E-mail message — should perform as advertised. You have the right to test each and every software feature, separately and simultaneously, and expect them to consistently do what you need them to.

**Unreasonable:** Verbal promises. Come on, we’re all professionals. If there’s a critical component to your system, or a key feature you are looking for, make sure to get it in writing. Understand this may mean you have to document it yourself and attach it to the order. If you are promised “lifetime free software upgrades,” make sure you know whose lifetime you are talking about. If you are promised the release of the product you’ll be getting will wash your win-

dows, and clean windows are important to you, make sure it’s documented.

**Reasonable:** If you buy multiple products, they should all work. We all know there can be issues with product reliability from all manufacturers, particularly with cutting-edge product lines. Nonetheless, you shouldn’t sign off on a system until 100 percent of it is up and running for a specified time period, usually 30 days. If this isn’t possible, insist there be spares on site during the burn-in period, at no expense to you.

**Unreasonable:** Things fail, and most products come with “depot” service type warranties. This means, unless you have a service contract, no one is going to visit you to replace your product free of charge during the warranty period. You should expect to pull the product, box it up, ship it to the repair center and wait a reasonable period for the repaired unit. If it is so critical that you can’t live without it for a week or two, consider purchasing a spare or a service contract.

**Reasonable:** If you have questions, concerns, or problems with your system or any individual products, you should be able to call someone for help. Sometimes, this gets complicated as we move to integrated subsystems from multiple manufacturers, but it is important to remember that isn’t your problem. You were promised a working system, and it’s not your job to make it that way. It may not happen on your first call, but there should be a point where companies stop pointing the finger at each other and start solving your problem. Integration isn’t just about the products; it also means that technical support groups should work together as well.

**Unreasonable:** Don’t expect everyone to immediately jump on an airplane and come to your rescue whenever there’s a problem. Before they will send someone to help, you will need to do your part. Be prepared to perform the troubleshooting steps they ask for and get back to them with the answers. Give them time to get the right people involved. It’s difficult anticipating every possi-

ble application and environment in which a product may be used, and sometimes, they truly haven’t seen that problem before.

### Everyone Wants a Little Satisfaction

The common theme here is that, at the end of the day, everyone is after the same thing. Customer satisfaction is critical to the longevity of every manufacturer and integrator, and no customer wants to be impossible to satisfy. Remember, even after the bill is paid, your status as a “reference account” is extremely valuable. When folks do right by you, be vocal about it.

But if all else fails, in the upcoming months we’ll look at some strategies for escalating the issues and making sure your voice is heard, loud and clear.

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