



Article

An Inside Look at Beta Testing the IQ Panel 2

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Bench Test reviewer Bob Grossman shares what it was like to beta test the Qolsys IQ Panel 2 over 18 months.

Back in **December of 2014 we reviewed the Qolsys IQ Panel** as one of our earlier bench tests. When we review a product, it is generally done over a fixed time period ranging from a few days to a couple of months.

This gives us enough time to learn the product, put it through its paces, and verify the stability and operability as best we can under the usual time constraints. We don't live with a product for an extended period, so our reviews are, by necessity, educated first impressions.

When **Qolsys** started working on the follow up IQ Panel 2, they invited us to participate in its beta program. We're not sure if this was done because of our enthusiasm for the first-generation IQ Panel, our fresh approach to the product (also called "inexperience, I believe), or the relentless stream of questions they got from us the first time around.

Regardless of the reasons, we thought it would be an interesting experience. I have personally been involved in the beta process on other products when working on the manufacturer's side, but never as the actual tester. But, how much work could it be? You try things out and report on them, right? Easy-peasy!

We were sent a unit in August 2016 and worked with it in various stages for over 18 months before writing up the review that appears in the March 2018 issue of Security Sales & Integration, which you can **read here**.

This included connecting it to more than 40 devices, upgrading software numerous times, and testing arcane features that would ordinarily be a deeper dive than reviews require.

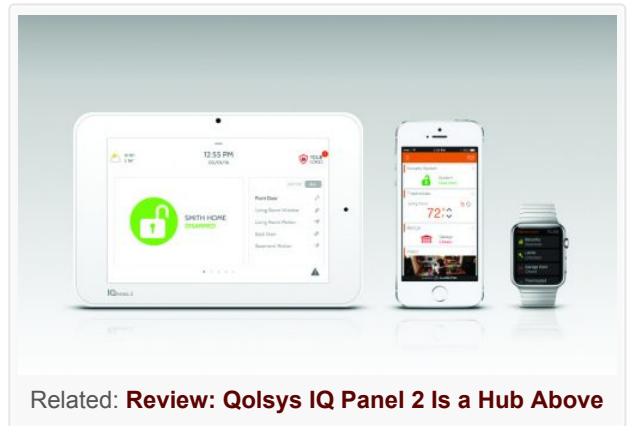
Let me start by saying that the folks at Qolsys take the beta test process far more seriously than any company I have ever worked for. Testers received weekly "homework" assignments, and every time I turned around a new box was showing up with products to add in the test system.

This included leak detection, motion sensors, image sensors, cameras, remote alarm enunciators, panic buttons, keypads, IQ remote (7" secondary touchscreen tablet) panels and even Z-Wave light bulbs. You can read more about this in the review, but as space for that was limited, I thought I'd add some more here.

Internally, I was expecting a beta product that was rough around the edges, but everything Qolsys has sent me looked like finished product. Construction is excellent, and the IQ Panel 2 is extremely dealer friendly.

During the beta process there were a few occasions where daughter boards were either added or upgraded and, in each case, it was a simple process to swap a board out.

This despite the reduced depth and addition of a Bluetooth radio to the other five previously included (WiFi, image sensor, **Z-Wave**, cellular and encrypted 319.5MHz security RF) with the panel.



The process for software updates is also impressive, — a "one touch" upgrade process made things very simple for release versions, and the panel can be updated using a Micro SD card as well.

The beta process was intentionally more cumbersome as an added layer of security, as Ken Arnold, director of communications at Qolsys explained. "Part of being in Beta and not having anyone accidentally download a Release Candidate version of software caused us to use the patch tag method for upgrades."

With this feature you just type in a string of characters, called a software patch tag, and tell the panel to update, which it then did via WiFi.

Given an extended test period, we had ample opportunity to try every feature, including some that were rolled out over the year-and-a-half. In most cases even new features being rolled out were rock solid.

In all cases, issues discovered during the beta test were resolved. Extensive range and reliability tests were performed as well, with standard and long-range sensors tested and compared. Over time, I watched the range and reliability get better and better, and the information learned from the beta process will likely wind up improving tech support for Qolsys customers going forward.

I already have a fairly sophisticated home automation system incorporating almost 100 devices, using a SmartThings hub as a central gateway. It features Z-Wave, Lutron Caseta, Philips Hue, Logitech Harmony and Amazon Echo integration, and many of the features are common to both systems.

When I complained that the systems could not be easily upgraded, there were a few calls and email messages to determine what features I had in my SmartThings system that could not be duplicated in the Qolsys system.

There weren't many, but I ultimately integrated the two systems using a contact closure out from each system to connect to the other, with full support from the Qolsys engineering team.

The systems run in parallel; when my phone shows up, Qolsys disarms, unlocks the door, and sets the temperature, and SmartThings turns on and off certain lights, with both being controlled through Alexa when needed.

But when I leave, all of the SmartThings motion sensors and door contacts that are essential for home automation are set to trip the dry contact on the back panel of the IQ Panel 2, using a Z-Wave relay module.



Related: **Qolsys Releases Secondary Touchscreen Tablet for IQ Panel 2**

It can be dangerous to give a reviewer a beta test product, knowing that the product will be critiqued at the end of the test period. On the one hand, the reviewer sees all the warts, wrinkles, drawbacks and deficiencies of the product. On the other hand, if you are prepared to resolve issues and make the best product you possibly can, you'll win over a reviewer and (hopefully) gain some valuable insights along the way.

That was the case for me, and I eagerly await future enhancements. And, maybe someday the chance to play with the IQ Panel 3!

Click here to view the Qolsys IQ Panel 2 review

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Also published as:

An Inside Look at Beta Testing the IQ Panel 2 on the Security Sales & Integration blog.



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