

By Ralph C. Jensen



TAKING TRAINING VERY SERIOUSLY

The lifeline from a company to its dealer network



Training is the life blood of any successful organization. Training employees on how to do their jobs better is one thing, but training dealers and integrators on how to use and incorporate security products is another.

Training doesn't come easy, but it is something that Galaxy Control Systems (GCS) takes very seriously.

"When the company was formed, much of the work was with the government, so we provided training," said Robert Laughlin, president of Galaxy Control Systems. "When the Navy took their business to commercial vendors, we had to transition our business model. We found it difficult, but training, nonetheless, was a big part of our activity."

While Galaxy still has some government contracts, most of the work is with industrial and commercial vendors. In addition, the company has cozier

up to the National Guard in nearly every state, where they provide access control systems and training.

"If a company does not provide training on the systems it sells, it typically increases the overall cost of doing business," Laughlin said. "We have found that when we invest in training for our reseller partners, they are more successful selling and implementing our solutions, which also results in happier customers."

PROVIDING KEY INSIGHT

System Galaxy Certification Training is a free service held at the company's Walkersville, Md. training facility and is taught by a highly-skilled, technical team. That team is led by former University of Delaware Professor, Jeff Boyle, who provides hands-on experience with GCS equipment and software. The emphasis of the classroom is placed on instruction, installation, program-

ming and troubleshooting. Students have access to a private workstation and series 600 hardware during the week-long course.

"The goal of our training sessions is to keep the student engaged and rotate our experts in and out of the classroom throughout the year," Laughlin said. "Our instructors are the same people that handle our technical calls from dealers and integrators. They know what they are talking about because they have been on the front lines of resolving issues and answering questions."

An American manufacturer since 1974, Galaxy is now represented in every state in the United States and 60 countries. Their training-inspired, tech support is available 24/7. After 5 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, the on-call technician handles the support duties.

"Our training team doubles as the tech team, so we talk about how best to help the integrator," said Boyle, currently technical support team lead and training coordinator at Galaxy. "The more we know about what is wrong during an integration, the better we are able to provide a fix. The same goes for training. The more interactive our students are, the better we can help them understand the access control process."

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A TRAINER

"Part of being a trainer is understanding the testing and development of the products we offer," said Boyle.

Hired a few years ago as the fourth technician to the team, Boyle quickly got up to speed and harnessed his natural tendency to teach and train.

"As I got to know the system, fully understanding it, I naturally wanted to pass along the information as a trainer," Boyle said. "Teaching has always been the thing I enjoy doing. I also enjoy testing the software here at Galaxy as we upgrade it and make it better. I sit in on the software meetings and offer my opinion from the tech support side."

"When an upgrade is made, we filter it to the dealer and offer additional training, if that is needed. We take calls from the dealer to make sure they understand what they have."

End users should most often work directly with the dealer."

Training is not open to the masses; it is limited to only 12 seats in the classroom setting. Boyle said that the training program is part of the dealer/manufacturing relationship. And, while the setting is rather intimate, a first-time student can really benefit,

especially if they are sitting next to someone who has experience. Boyle said that when students are able to interact and work side-by-side, successful training takes on a new light.

"This is a truly a hands-on experience for the students," Boyle said. "Two students can sit together and help each [other] along. Of course,

I am responsible for teaching and helping students learn, but the teamwork is amazing. When students get it and complete the certification, they are then released out into the 'wild' to practice what they've learned."

IN THE CLASSROOM

Boyle loves the classroom. He says

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that teaching can get boring, but seeing students interpret materials based on his presentation can make all the difference in the week-long series. He will sometimes present the material differently, making the curriculum more exciting to him.

"Most days, the teaching comes together perfectly, and that's when the adrenaline kicks in," Boyle said. "It is easy to develop a rapport with

the students, because they want to be there and learn, and because the topics we are discussing are relevant to their work.

"When things go right, I'm very energized at the end of the week. Even more important is when the students realize they are going to become certified and all the work has been meaningful."

Even outside of his own class-

room, Boyle said that he likes to sit in on other classes, even if he is not assigned to teach because there is opportunity for him to learn, and there are additional elements of the training business he can take away from others' experiences.

CHEERING FOR A WINNER

Perhaps the biggest cheerleader of the training process is Galaxy Executive

Vice President Rick Caruthers, who joined the company in 2001 and has risen from Mid Atlantic Regional Manager to Executive Vice President. His first goal was (and is) to make sure the end user is happy with the product, but also to make sure they understand what they are using; therefore, training quickly became a priority.

"We emphasize training at our office in Maryland and out on the West Coast," Caruthers said. "We have some much larger integrator companies that we work with, and we bring the training to them. We often take our training courses on the road for better support of our customers. In fact, we have taken training to numerous international locations in the last several years.

"Training and our customer response is our way of taking care of the customer, whether it is an end user or integrator. We want to go above and beyond in providing knowledge."

Galaxy integrated access control systems are sold, installed and served by certified dealers. Company officials call them a part of an elite international network of fully trained dealers. These dealers are screened for professionalism and ethics, and are selected because of their technical expertise and strong commitment to customer service.

GSC demands their dealers complete a rigorous training program on the installation and configuration of the company's access control systems and all associated products.


"The dealers are our link to the customer," Caruthers said. "These are the people who maintain the quality and integrity of our products. Certified dealers ensure that each system meets, or exceeds, each customer's expectations."

Dealers are the group Galaxy really focuses on when it comes to training; some rep firms help promote the courses, as well. According to Boyle, classes in Walkersville are held about eight times a year and training on the West Coast is held several times each year.

Galaxy and Boyle also offer customized courses for an end user. This will happen when a dealer blends in training with the sale of an access control system. For instance, the

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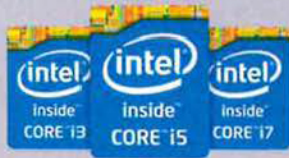
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Plano, Texas Independent School District and Baylor Medical Center, located in Dallas, were sold training programs from the dealer. Courses are tailored to just a few days of training, and heavily address the needs of those particular attendees.

EXECUTIVE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Laughlin believes so deeply in train-

ing that he has formed an executive council consisting of architects, engineers and consultants. They are involved in a quarterly meeting, and most show up to offer direction—rain, snow or shine. They are believers in the training principle, as well.

"We've been the best-kept secret in the access control business for too many years," Laughlin said. "We don't want to be a secret any longer. We

want to disseminate our message to the dealers, and there is no better way to do that than to have these people involved in an advisory capacity."

Security integrators' Access Control Group (ACG), Jackson, Miss., truly believe in training. They have their own in-house training for new employees, who, after about a year on the job, are sent to Walkersville for additional training on Galaxy software.

"With changing technology and new products on the market, we want our installers to know what is available to us as integrators," said John Chism, president of ACG, and a member of the GCS executive advisory council. "The software training that we receive has made us better integrators."

Clif King, CFO at ACG, said that because the Galaxy training is free, this helps the integrator balance the bottom line, while providing the most up-to-date software training for their team.

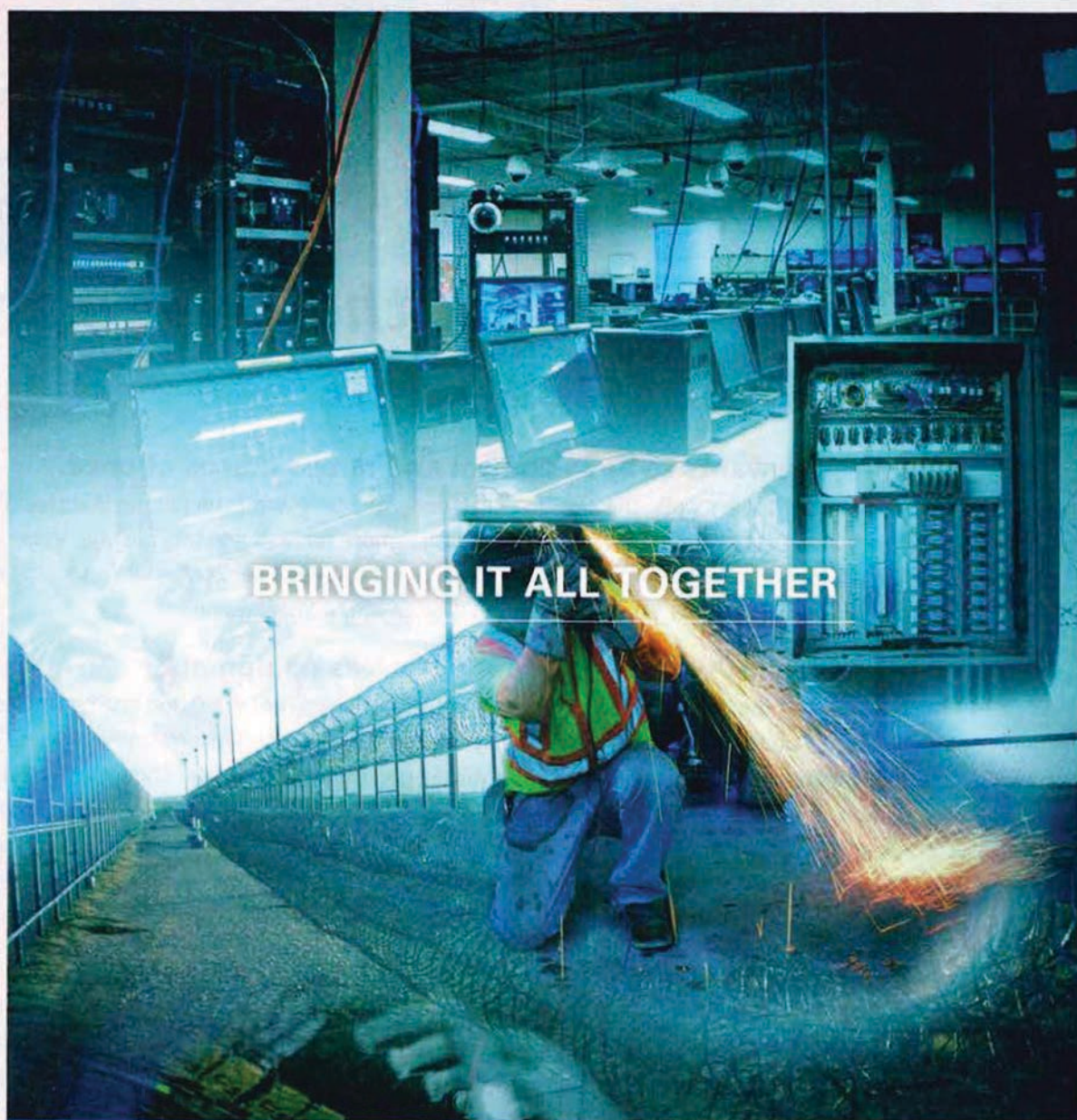
Dedication to training gets to the point for some integrators. John J. Lutz, general manager of Guardian Protection Services, said that the training classroom is an excellent representation of a learning environment, allowing his firm to send newer techs to Galaxy "and have them [new techs] come back with a really solid handle on both the hardware and the software, without us having to take the time to train them in-house."

"I think the proliferation of network-based product places a great obligation on the dealer to adequately train," Lutz said. "I'll go as far to say that people in the security industry should probably consider hiring IT-certified employees to meet the requirement of this environment."

Training also provides qualified installation, and both integrators and end users are quite conscientious about having the job done right, the first time, "and in the most efficient manner possible," said Michael S. Ehrlich, president and CEO of Integrated Security Inc. and a GCS advisory board member. "Today, training is more important than ever as products and technology continue to march on at a rapid pace. Experiencing this without training would significantly impact the bottom line and our ability to deliver on the promises made to clients."

Training has been the lifeline from Galaxy to its dealer network. It is how they disseminate their message to the dealer, and when the dealer gets the message, the end user is bound to benefit. DS

Ralph C. Jensen is the editor-in-chief of Security Products magazine.



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