

Blanket Security

TR speaks to Atlanta's leading residential and commercial security experts to bring you the latest technology that will keep you and your family safe and secure.

By Nate Chapnick

Though we all love Atlanta, there's no denying the fact that our city has its fair share of crime. According to the FBI's national crime database, in 2006, Atlanta had the fourth-highest murder rate in the nation. In many crime statistics, Atlanta ranks well above the national average. "Most of us probably know someone who has been the victim of a crime," says Jim Callahan, chief operating officer of Ackerman Security Systems, Atlanta's largest security company. "Once you have been a victim of a crime, your life is changed. We meet so many clients who were burglarized in their previous home and then just didn't feel comfortable living there, so they moved and decided to install a security system in their new home to prevent another break-in."

It used to be that security systems were designed to alert you and your neighbors if someone breaks into your home. Thankfully, technology has transformed home automation and security systems

into more of a means to *prevent* a home invasion than to simply sound an alarm.

Advanced Premises Systems owner and President Gus Cueto specializes in creating intelligent security systems that integrate into your home automation and home audio systems. According to Cueto, "It's important to make your home as uninviting to criminals as possible, so that the burglar won't pick your house in the neighborhood." If you already own a home automation system or advanced lighting control system like a Lutron, Crestron or Control4 system, then it's relatively easy to integrate protection. "With the new Crestron home automation systems, we can program your home to monitor your light usage," Cueto says. "When you're away, your system will reproduce those lighting choices that you make when you're home to make it look as though you're there when you really aren't."

Jim Callahan helps in the design of hundreds of security sys-



A well-lit exterior makes your home an undesirable target for potential criminals. New advances in surveillance systems allow you to monitor your home from your BlackBerry no matter how far your travels take you.





tems in and around Atlanta. Callahan won't reveal all of his security secrets—for obvious reasons—but he says that some of the newest security technology is much more advanced than in the past. You can protect your expensive flat-panel TVs with hard-wired detection systems that recognize if the wiring has been slashed or removed, as well as video monitoring that will send you a video message on your phone every time your front door is opened so you can see who comes in and out of your home.

As people spend more and more time entertaining at home, Callahan has seen a rise in the demand for unique security systems for particular areas of the home. “We see many people who want specific protection for their closets, jewelry areas, gun cabinets, artwork or liquor cabinets,” he says. “When you host parties, you don't want to spend the whole evening worrying if someone is in your bedroom grabbing your watches from the closet.” Callahan has designed dis-

creet notification systems to inform homeowners when people go into these “out-of-bounds” areas, allowing them to intervene during a theft or prevent one from occurring in the first place. Callahan also can have the information from these special sensors sent to Ackerman's UL-Certified central monitoring station.

Unlike some national security companies, which have their monitoring stations out-of-state, Ackerman's is located in Atlanta, and the company hires local, certified security experts to man the station. Ackerman received the Central Station Alarm Association's Five-Diamond Certification, a noteworthy distinction considering that only 27 out of 2,800 central stations in the United States have earned the award. In addition to recognizing the company's extra training requirements, the certification commends Ackerman's rapid dispatch rate, which averages between 25 and 30 seconds from the time they receive a signal from your home's alarm system.



Home automation integrates your security system with all of your other smart home features.



Regardless of what room you're in, Crestron's portable home controller keeps you informed and lets you adjust security features on the fly.

Tips From The Experts

Common-sense ways to safeguard you and your home

Be vigilant: Always be on the lookout for things that look out of the ordinary.

Lock your doors: Don't invite criminals into your house by leaving your doors unlocked.

Leave windows closed: Leaving your windows locked and closed, especially when you're not home, helps to safeguard your home from a crime of opportunity.

Don't leave valuables in plain sight: If you leave your purse or briefcase in the window, even if your window is closed, you're easy prey for a smash-and-grab burglar.

Leave your car in the garage: Especially if you have an expensive vehicle, store it in a garage to keep it off the streets. Also, be sure to take your keys with you along with any other valuables you have in your car.

A sophisticated monitoring system is only one part of the security equation. Other advancements in home security include keyless entry systems, sirens, driveway sensors, advanced motion sensors, deck sensors and even special duress codes that allow you to send a message to the central station without alerting the criminal that you're contacting the authorities.

At Advanced Premises Systems, Cueto designs home and commercial systems with magnetic locks and bioscript readers, which use your fingerprint as your key to enter the home. "The magnetic door locking system that we created will lock the door automatically when you leave," Cueto says. "And, in some cases, unlock it when it senses your motion so that you never have to deal with remembering to lock and unlock your door, or to leave a spare key hidden underneath the welcome mat—a bad idea no matter what security system you may have."

Cueto also has found innovative security solutions that allow your home's existing systems to communicate with each other. "There are so many devices in your house, which, if they worked together, could accomplish much more than if they worked by themselves," Cueto says. He gave an example: "If you have a smoke detector that could communicate with your lighting system, then, when the detector senses smoke, it will turn on your lights to help alert you to the situation. It can also be programmed to shut down your home's HVAC system to prevent the smoke from spreading into other areas of your home."

Whether you are away from your home and family for business or simply lying awake in your bed, knowing that you have an advanced security system brings significant peace of mind. As Callahan put it, "Once your home has been violated, there's nothing you can do to erase those memories." Thankfully, all of these latest security technologies help to ensure that you and your family are never burglarized. ▶▶