

Meet the installer

Security life with Peter Goodchild of Welwyn Garden Alarms & Welgard

Do you use a distributor or buy direct?

We do both. Fire systems we get from manufacturers and security technology we buy from Enterprise or ADL.

Is third party accreditation beneficial to your company?

We have always been driven by accreditation and what it stands for. When we started out with it was just for intruder then we moved on to CCTV and access control. Unfortunately I do see a number of companies that do not have fire accreditation and haven't put in the effort still picking up large projects so I think we do need to educate clients on the value of using accredited companies. In terms of fire jobs we've had people telling us that they approached us because of BAFE while for security, which is driven by insurers, accreditation is a must. Domestic customers don't seem to be too worried about certification until their insurer says that the system needs to be maintained by an accredited firm.

What would be a typical project for you?

There isn't a typical project for us as we've always been happy to take on any work regardless of the challenge. For example we fitted solar powered systems for an application that didn't have mains power and we had never done that before. Basically, we'll go from a small domestic system right up to a large integrated fire system. When I first started all we were fitting were intruder alarms and with a name like Welwyn Garden Alarms people often assume that we just do alarms for gardens in Welwyn, but we certainly don't!

Are there any common requests from customers that give you problems?

Timing in the domestic market is always an issue. For example you hear "I've lived in this house for twenty years and got burgled yesterday, so can you fit me an alarm tomorrow," which is an issue I imagine all installers are familiar with. I think you have to manage people's expectations when it comes to lead times as no matter how many engineers I seem to have, the time frames don't change very much.

Is there a security skills shortage?

I think that there is a shortage and everyone knows the situation. The danger is that installation companies are now picking up people who demand a high level of pay but don't perhaps command it - the demands are high and the skill



Name: Peter Goodchild

Job title: Managing Director

Time in security/fire: 28 years

Company: Welwyn Garden Alarms, Welgard

Location: The office is in Hatfield but we work nationwide

Areas of expertise: All aspects of electronic fire and security systems

Accreditations: NSI Gold, BAFE, ELECSA, SafeContractor, Which? Trusted Trader

set is quite low. We've been lucky in that we've always had the attitude that we should train up our own people and invest in our people. I have lost engineers over the years as they have started their own firms, which is fine, but we now have a young, driven team on board and I'm happy with everyone onboard.

"There isn't a typical project for us as we've always been happy to take on any work regardless of the challenge"

What will be the impact of smart/home automation on the security sector?

I know that there are plenty of DIY systems out there but you need to have a certain amount of skill and experience to install it properly. We spend a lot of time taking out self-installed systems and putting in a professional product instead and, to be fair to the manufacturers, the systems are worlds apart in terms of reliability. We do get the dreaded phone call of "I've bought a camera system, can you come and fit it" and our general answer is "no", because if there are any issues afterwards they will be our problems, despite the low quality of the kit. The main →



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problem with wireless systems is the battery and failures. And don't forget some of the self-install systems rely entirely on home broadband being active. As soon as the network goes down the system is not working.

What is the industry's biggest myth?

When I first started in the industry there was a mindset that if you had a burglar alarm on your property then you must have something worth stealing, which at the time was probably true because the systems were not cheap in those days. However, today the technology is so affordable that it no longer fair to say that about alarms, although you do occasionally still hear it. The other myth concerns spiders setting off detectors - I'm not sure if that's as common an event as people say. I think this is more a case of the engineer's skill set and whether or not they have checked if there is reduced voltage on the cable or any environmental issues.

How will AI affect the future of technology in the market?

Technology is only as good as the front end that is running the system. I think many of us have had experience of voice activated home automation systems that don't do what we want them to do, so I would say that maybe at the high-end of security where lots of money is spent on analytics, the tech is probably great, but at the lower end there is still a long way to go. I can see AI being more widespread in its use, but I hope we don't end up designing expertise out of the mix so we end up with false alarm levels going through the roof. I don't think that you can put the monitoring of access, intruder, fire and surveillance all in the hands of one camera compared to having dedicated technology for

each discipline. Security needs to be secure.

What would make your job easier?

Another me would be good! Again if we could manage people's expectations that would help. Customers see things happening in films or on TV and assume that's what their system will do. The CGI and the liberties with reality that movie writers take with security, especially CCTV, leads people to believe that they can do things like zooming many times into images. Managing their expectations over price is also an issue.

What is your ultimate/fantasy electronic security product?

I'm not sure there is one really. Back in the day there were differences in all of the alarm panels so that they each had various functions that were not on the other panels. Today the manufacturers have done such a good job with their product development that the panels tick all of the boxes in terms of functionality.

Will England ever win the football World Cup again?

To be honest I'm more into UFC than football, but I do know that the team is getting better. I like Gareth Southgate, but when you look at the other teams from around the world we might need a bit of luck on our side to win anything. They get paid a lot of money and I do wonder if players are driven by winning trophies as much as in years gone by.

If you won £25,000 what would you do with it?

There are two answers; the selfish one of going on holiday or the unselfish one of giving it to charity - so maybe I would do a bit of both!

