

THE CAMPUS SAFETY ISSUE

Plus: ISC West Wrap-up

SECURITY SALES[®] & INTEGRATION

INDUSTRY'S #1 TECHNOLOGY & BUSINESS AUTHORITY SINCE 1979

Briscoe Protective's Knockout Combination

**Personalized, Bundled
Services Pack Punch**

Up, Up & Away Go Video, Access

Study Shows Biz, Tech, Market Gains

Hot Education and Health-Care Opportunities

**Credentialing ■ License Plate Capture
Mass Notification ■ Surveillance**

BRISCOE PROTECTIVE ROLLS WITH PUNCHES, KO'S COMPETITORS

A lot has changed since Long Island's Briscoe Protective Systems threw its hat into the residential security ring nearly 40 years ago. Company leadership explains how and why the firm has moved up in class to become a heavyweight provider of commercial security and fire solutions, and champion of community causes.

By Scott Goldfine

SURE ROCKY BALBOA had the heart of a lion, but he would have never gotten as far as he did without a remarkable trainer in his corner providing the requisite guidance, support and tough love. Cue "Gonna Fly Now (Theme From Rocky)," and all due respect to the late, great Burgess Meredith. Fact is whether facing threats in boxing or security/fire safety you need the right partner in your corner. How apropos then that one such provider is actually named after a prizefighting trainer, Joseph Bartholomew "Bert" Briscoe, who coached dominant Light-Heavyweight World Champion Archie Moore.

Founded in 1978 as a residential alarm company called Delco Security Systems in Brooklyn, N.Y., the business was later named Briscoe Protective Systems after the grandfather of Bob Williams, one of the company's principals. Bert Briscoe's ideals are credited for inspiring the company motto, "People Helping People Make a Difference." That philosophy transcends the firm's security

and fire/life-safety products and services as evidenced by its personalized customer care, free end-user training courses and Just One Life program partnering with fire districts to distribute (and sometimes install) smoke/CO detectors.

"My grandfather always told me the most important thing you can do in life is make a difference in other people's lives. It always stayed with me," says Williams, who now serves as president of the company. "He passed when I was about 13, but my grandfather's fighting spirit lives on at Briscoe today."

Through the years, Briscoe Protective has nimbly adapted to market needs and new opportunities. In the late 1980s, management formed a fire alarm equipment distribution company specializing in New York City-approved fire alarms. This business grew more rapidly than the security division, so in 1993 they combined the companies. Later that year, the residential security accounts were sold in order to focus on the commercial and institutional markets. Today, Briscoe Protective Systems provides a wide array of security and fire safety solutions to a wide variety of clients from three locations (New York City, Long Island and Westchester).

Briscoe Protective's approach is reaping dividends as the company weathered the recession like a champ and came out of it swinging. In an exclusive *SSI* interview, Williams and two of his top advisors — Vice President/General Manager David Miranda and Vice President/Comptroller Margaret Eckel — take off their gloves to reveal why business *is* personal for them. The execs also lend insight into one of Briscoe's chief markets, education and health-care campuses.



Briscoe Protective uses Sedona's computerized business system to efficiently coordinate dispatching techs, who all have iPads in the field.



Briscoe Protective Systems President Robert Williams (right) and Vice President/General Manager David Miranda have helped lead the business to 10%-15% growth so far this year.

Briscoe Protective has diversified through the years. How have you gone about that?

BOB WILLIAMS: We originally started as a residential burglar alarm company. However, the competition was fierce and so in order to get into more sophisticated work we decided to go into fire. We're basically commercial, industrial and institutional in our approach. When we stayed in fire we noticed that some of the companies we worked for were having other security firms come in, and as the competition was getting fiercer in security they were trying to do fire as well. We decided to branch into security so that we could take one customer and offer them a multifaceted approach.

Now we're trying to bundle our services, similar to what the cable industry does. Many people today use their cable company for phone and Internet as well as television service. They usually bun-

dle their services. So we've been working with sprinkler companies and also we've added fire extinguishers to our repertoire so we can provide all the fire and security needs of a customer, and they don't have to go to another location. Bundled services is the mantra for Briscoe for this year.

How is 2016 shaping up for the business, what is helping you meet your numbers?

WILLIAMS: We're 10%-15% above last year's figures. The reason we feel that has happened is because we've personalized our dealings with the customer rather than just focus on bulk sales. We find that when companies get larger the services become a commodity rather than a personalization. Fire and security services are very personal, especially with security directors whose reputation and job depends on how well they provide the services for the customers. They're looking for some-



FAST FACTS

- ▶ Founded in 1978 in Brooklyn, N.Y.
- ▶ Employees number 48
- ▶ Annual revenues are \$6.5M+
- ▶ Product mix is fire alarm services 60%; security, access and video 20%; monitoring services 20%
- ▶ Areas of New York operations are New York City 65%, Long Island 25% and Westchester 10%
- ▶ Customer mix is 60% commercial, 30% institutional and 10% industrial

body to talk to and that knows the different types of services. They're also looking for one source so they don't have to deal with 10 companies to get fire and security.

EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW: BRISCOE PROTECTIVE PULLS NO PUNCHES



Through the years since its founding nearly 40 years ago, Briscoe Protective Systems has nimbly adapted to market needs and new opportunities. Today, the company provides a wide array of security and fire safety solutions to a wide variety of clients from three locations (New York City, Long Island and Westchester).

As Briscoe grows, how are you managing to continue to deliver a high standard of service?

DAVID MIRANDA: We really pride ourselves in our service and feel that's what makes us stand out. We have a saying that anybody can sell a red box, but it's what you provide behind that red box. Our great service leads to organic growth, which is wonderful but then causes the issue of trying to keep up personnel to match that growth. Then while salaries increase, our customers are always looking for lower prices. So we do a really good job of watching costs and streamlining procedures.

WILLIAMS: To maintain a high standard of service we use the Sedona computerized business system to dispatch our technicians, who all have iPads in the field and are able to get to service calls in the least amount of time thanks to our coordinated dispatching. And we're practically a paperless office because a customer can sign documents that can be sent back to the office immediately. We save a lot with economies of scale on that.

We have concentrated mostly on organic growth within our company. We find a lot of other companies that look to grow through acquisition are very fragmented. They still do a lot of things manually, and that inhibits their organic growth. We found that through the bundling we're able to grow very well, and do not have to go into the acquisition market for any significant growth.

What is the top operational challenge you face today and how are you contending with it?

MIRANDA: It's maintaining a quality technical staff, guys that are field ready. Normally when you find or are approached by a technician that has some years of experience, my experience has been they come with bad habits. So we try to hire personnel that is raw but has a great attitude and is a team player. And we utilize our in-house resources to try and ramp up their training as quickly as possible. Besides our training boards we've created, we like to do a lot of online training. We seek to help advance their knowledge so as to exceed our customers' expectations.

What marketing channels bring the most business — referrals, prospecting, RFPs?

MIRANDA: We are blessed to have a very proactive marketing team. We continued to grow through the financial crisis of 2007-2009, and one of the main things we grew was our marketing team. We knew at some point things would turn so we wanted to be ready. Where other companies were probably cutting their marketing staff, we actually increased it. They really get us involved with lots of different associations such as electrical contractors. We do a lot of nonprofit work in New York City so they find every possible trade show or meeting that we can really use our brand to try to generate new business.

Besides the word of mouth that spreads with regards to our service, our Web site is constantly being tweaked and we really stay up on the trends, keeping up with what people are looking for. We've instituted a whole variety of different site features, such as a chatroom, that have brought us great leads the past couple of years.

Another key marketing tool we use is providing a certification class that helps staffs prepare for the FDNY [Fire Department of New York] exam. We've given this training free of cost to more than 1,000 people. It's a three-hour course given by regular staff members who take their time to go out as part of giving back to community. And it also brings business. People see the dedication and knowledge Briscoe has to provide these free classes, and they come back to us and look for quotes on their business needs.

What about company culture? Do you have a special sauce that keeps personnel motivated and ensures high retention?

WILLIAMS: We call our employees co-workers because I like that word better. We all work together. As president of the company, I don't use the title president. I use "chief co-worker" and working together is important in your work family. We give awards out, a couple awards a year to people who take the Extra Step in providing above-average customer service and things.

We had one young lady who went out

into the field herself when we couldn't get a technician fast enough to one of the locations. She had had some training at Briscoe on what to do, but was never in the field. She went out to the customer and a technician explained to her how to make a temporary repair to the system. That was at 2 a.m. That's the kind of dedication we have. It's not something we recommend all the time but this young lady took it upon herself to do it, and definitely got the Extra Step Award.

We celebrate everybody's birthday at a monthly party where we also acknowledge different events in people's lives or families. People who aren't in the office, such as technicians, we send them a birthday card with a personal note and a certificate for a coffee gift card. We also have a fishing trip every year. We do a bowling event yearly. These are ways of developing teamwork and keeping people motivated.

Moving to technology and systems, what is a hot opportunity; what are the challenges?

WILLIAMS: The biggest one that's upcoming is the mass notification of people, especially in areas like campuses. College campuses have buildings that are separated from each other and they need to be able to let people know what's going on if there's an active shooter, if there has to be a lockdown of buildings and to keep everybody aware of situations. Especially today with terrorism, it creates a lot of confusion and people don't know if they're going into a situation or running from it. So mass notification using speakers and everything, combining



Briscoe Protective's staff carefully coordinates its efforts so as to remain a highly personalized, single-source fire and security solutions provider (above). As a prominent symbol of the pride the firm takes in helping firefighters better do their job and lessening the likelihood of fire-related casualties and losses, Briscoe shows off historic fire/life-safety memorabilia throughout its headquarters (below).

them with security and fire alarms, is a very big market that's upcoming.

Probably the top challenge is introducing people to the concept of mass notification. A lot of times schools like to use pagers or sending it to a smartphone or E-mail rather than a voice notification. So a change in people's attitude toward how they get notified is an important thing. Also there's a budgetary constraint. When you think of new concepts and new ways of doing things, people always say, "How can I pay for it?" The budgets would have to expand in certain areas. Some states provide some funding, but more cooperation from governments to

try to help get some of these systems that affect the general public is important.

What about recurring revenue and services? What offerings are you zeroing in on?

WILLIAMS: Video verification is becoming very popular and video monitoring of an alarm event in real-time is really something presenting some opportunities. Also medical alerts, which is geared a lot toward residential but it's coming also on the commercial market as well. And the managed services where you can remotely monitor access control and alarm systems via portable devices.

Whenever you start with a new service and new concept it takes a while for people to understand how it can affect their lifestyle and be used within their lifestyle. We have to reeducate our customers into how things work and how new things are done, so that they'll ease into these new services. We have to be able to create a demand for them by increasing the understanding of the services, how they work, and how they can benefit the customer.

Campuses play large in Briscoe's customer mix. What are some keys to success?

WILLIAMS: Combining and bundling services, especially in the K-12 market where if an event happens like a panic situation you just don't send an alarm



EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW: BRISCOE PROTECTIVE PULLS NO PUNCHES

into an office. You have to combine the services and maybe notify all the staff via phone. You may do lockdown on certain rooms. You may send a message over the speaker system. Providing the total solution to that type of scenario, especially with the younger kids, is very important. It has to be automatic, not letting people be able to chock open doors and rear exits and things. You want to have entrants go through a particular area in the school and not four or five areas. It has to be done with a plan and has to be a unified system.

When you go to colleges and universities where you have older students, and some colleges today want to almost be 24 hours and you have people living on campus as well, that brings a whole different myriad of challenges. As I had mentioned, you can address them by using a mass notification system, where not only do you send messages via texting or E-mail but also in voice activation in these buildings as well.

In health care the challenges are dealing with the Joint Commission that accredits those facilities. They have changing rules and regulations, and you have to understand them. It's not only what a particular hospital or health-care facility wants. It's what the Joint Commission decides they want generally for all hospitals and health-care facilities that you have to understand in order to get past their accreditation approvals.

How do you set your company apart from the competition in the campus arena?

WILLIAMS: When you go into the campus arena it's usually a lot more people involved in life safety than in smaller places. Usually campuses have a public safety department as well as a facility department. Offering to educate them is a very important thing, being able to do the classes mentioned earlier. We teach people how to maintain their fire alarm systems, and in certain jurisdictions like New York City they require somebody onsite in school as well as in any facility that has a fire alarm system to understand how they work in the different devices. They're actually responsible for reporting to the owners and to the responding alarm companies.

We differentiate by being able to provide education to these customers, in both the public safety and the facility manage-



Training is central at Briscoe Protective. Not only internally for techs and other workers, but also externally for the community, with free certification courses offered to those preparing for the FDNY exam.

ment area to get them to understand how to deal with the security and fire alarm systems, and how they work together in unison to provide unified response.

What else can you tell me about Briscoe Protective's role in the community?

MAGGIE ECKEL: Briscoe takes pride in working in cooperation with our customers in order to fulfill our founder's motto, Bob's grandfather, of "People helping people make a difference." Our largest customer type is quite possibly not-for-profits, many of which provide such greatly needed services for youth and adults of disabilities. Things have turned back to the communities and away from institutions, so we find that's a much-needed service our customers are providing.

Briscoe donates to our customers in the ways of journal ads for their fundraising efforts. We regularly donate to our customers and attend their fundraising events. Also throughout our community we provide donations to many charitable organizations we believe are really making a difference.

Tell me about the company's onsite fire detection and response history memorabilia.

WILLIAMS: There's two ends of the fire industry: It's the fire alarms where we stand in silence like sentinels waiting for alarms to happen, and also the fire department that responds and depends on us to be able to pinpoint alarms to them. We have a

lot of different items that show both ends.

We started with the fire marks that were issued by insurance companies and put on buildings in the late 1700s, early 1800s. When the volunteer firefighters would respond, they got paid or donated their effort after they put out the fire from the insurer involved. Many early fire safety regulations came from insurance companies because they had to make businesses and residents whole if something happened. It was very important those fires were put out fast because most original documents lost in a fire would not be able to be reproduced. Especially in cities like New York where buildings are very close, fire spread easily.

We also have fire street pull stations from the 1800s, and we have early 110V fire sprinkler supervisory panels. We have an Edwards fire alarm bell you used to have to wind up. Can you imagine going into a high-rise building today and winding up 200 bells? Years ago that was what happened. We also have about 100 fire patches from different fire units.

There's a lot of pride in what we do here and we like to express it by showing all the different historical fire alarm equipment. SS

► MORE ROUNDS WITH BRISCOE ONLINE!
For much more from this conversation and photo galleries check out the online version at securitysales.com/briscoe2016.