

HOW A DATA-DRIVEN PROCESS CAN STREAMLINE SECURITY SYSTEMS INTEGRATION

It's not easy being a security integrator today, with increasing scopes of work that require knowledge not just of alarm systems, access control, cameras and video screens, but also audio/video systems, automation, touch screens, lighting, and networking – and the integration of these systems into a cohesive environment.

Security integrators typically manage every aspect of the project, from estimation to system design and project management. If these distinct functions aren't managed properly or, worse, are simply left to chance, the integrator risks losing money as well as customers.

Implementing the right data-driven software solution, such as D-Tools System Integrator (SI), streamlines these processes for increased profits and enhanced efficiency. Moreover, having the right processes in place can lead to happier customers and happier employees.

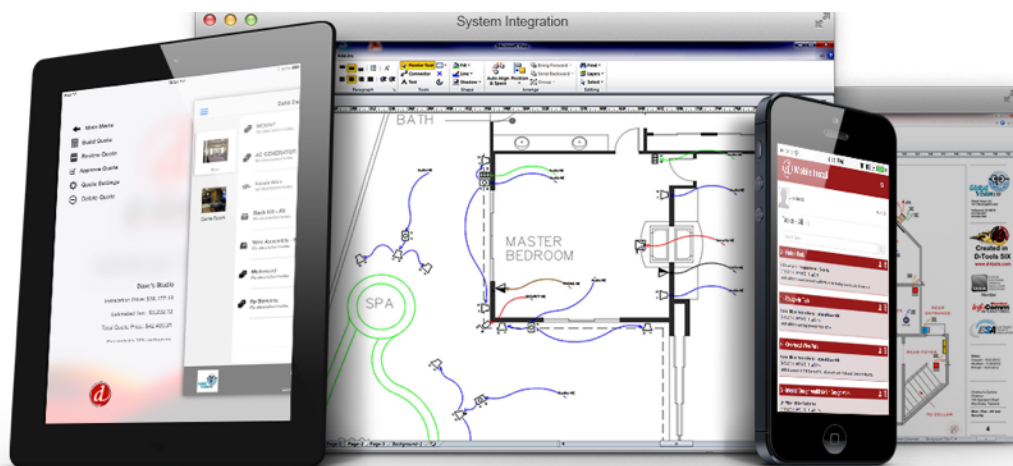
“We implemented D-Tools because of its expandability, robustness, and its great reputation among other integrators,” said Kassa Harrison, principal at custom electronics design and integration firm Harrison Home Systems of Golden, Colorado. “We knew D-Tools would be the foundation for significant growth within our company.”

In this article, we'll explore three different areas of the systems integration process in the security market where commercial and residential security integrators face potential pitfalls, and show how real-life integration firms overcome these challenges using System Integrator software.

System Integrator Software Solution Overview:

D-Tools System Integrator (SI) is a complete estimation, design, and project management software solution that fits the needs of security integrators in every vertical market. A robust business process automation solution, SI helps increase productivity while reducing time and costs associated with the design, installation, and integration of AV, energy, automation, lighting, security, and IT/networking systems; all important components of security in any home or building.

D-Tools makes it easy for security integrators to generate fast, accurate project estimates and proposals, detailed system designs and client documentation through a complete data-driven process when designing CCTV, Intrusion and Access Control, Fire and Safety Alarm, IP systems and more for both residential and commercial environments.



Security Integrators: Improve Processes in These 3 Areas for Greater Productivity and Better ROI

Estimation

Every project, of course, begins with an estimate. It's necessary so the client understands what he's getting and what he's paying for, and it permits the integrator to quote a price that permits a reasonable profit margin. But the repetitive task of copying and pasting product model numbers and prices for every proposal wastes valuable, non-billable time.

We've all been there. You spend precious moments searching through spreadsheets with blurry eyes. You get frustrated, and forget equipment or underestimate labor times. This rapidly erodes margins. Incomplete or inaccurate proposals also look unprofessional to the client, especially when they result in multiple change orders after the project begins.

Implementing a systems integration software solution such as D-Tools SI can help your team create fast, accurate proposals. All pricing and product data is derived from a constantly updated database—where all the information is readily accessible—so security system designers can dramatically reduce the time it takes to research products for proposals.

Imagine beating out competitors with a more complete, professional looking proposal and delivering it faster than anyone else in your market. You'd drastically improve your chances of winning bids while improving your bottom line on every project.

"Thanks to the D-Tools System Integrator, we can now quickly and easily build needed documents as we create proposals. SI has reduced the time it takes to generate proposals and has also increased our accuracy," says R.J. Spurr, Sales Engineer and Project Manager for Albuquerque, New Mexico-based Access Technologies, a technology consulting, service delivery and product procurement organization that specializes in voice, data, wireless, video, and security systems.

He continues, "I could never imagine returning to our previous method for generating proposals. With SI, managing and searching for products is easy and the process is far more flexible. We have a default SOW template that can be customized and inserted exactly where we want it in every proposal to prevent redundancies".

System Integrator offers many features that simplify every aspect of the proposal process. "The accessories and packages features not only reduce the time it takes to specify products, it prevents us from overlooking critical components and ensures add-ons are included. This is a tremendous benefit," says Spurr.

For residential and commercial integrators, alike, SI not only ensures that equipment lists are complete and accurate it also helps integrators see the "big picture" of profitability, adjust pricing accordingly, and achieve the best labor-to-equipment ratio, all resulting in overall improved gross profit margins. "Many of our company's most effective processes have been developed as a result of implementing D-Tools," says Harrison. "D-Tools has many well-thought-out processes built into the software that we've been rewarded for adopting into our business."

System Design

System design, the second of three project phases, communicates the parameters of the project to the end customer, in-house team members, subcontractors, and other trades. Concise designs provide a guide for the integrator's own team members, as well as subcontractors, to follow, ensuring accurate and efficient project execution.

Some integrators lack the in-house engineering resources to complete system design, and so they either skip this phase or assign it to another firm. Subcontracting this important work can be costly, while foregoing system design, altogether, can ruin a project before it begins.

On the other hand, if you include a project design in the proposal, you'll "wow" prospects with your attention to detail, improve the readability and aesthetic of every proposal, and help prospects visualize the results of the completed project, often resulting in a sale. Solid system designs can be the differentiator that solidifies the project and sets you apart from competitors.

Including accurate and detailed data within the initial estimate streamlines the design phase because data is automatically carried over from the estimate to the design phase. D-Tools System Integrator offers integrators several advantages:

- Create designs using industry-standard Visio and AutoCAD software
- Access specs and pricing for over 1 million products, plus import or add data from virtually any source
- Create proposals and drawings quickly by adding products from D-Tools' extensive manufacturers database
- Quickly and easily design floor plans, line diagrams, schematics and elevations, creating an accurate system design for both the end-customer and installation team

In addition, SI gives the user the ability to design the system first and eliminate the time-consuming documentation that follows. This allows for the project to be started directly in Visio or AutoCAD; build desired drawings and layouts, and System Integrator will produce all the documentation, including budgetary proposals, equipment lists, wire schedules and wire labels. No more wasting time with manual documentation that must be updated continuously during the project. "SI is giving us the tools we need to improve our system designs and overall operations in the long run," says Harrison.

"Prior to System Integrator, we used Microsoft Project, Excel, Word and Visio for planning and design. For any given project, we had multiple versions of spreadsheets, project files and documents to create and maintain. Now, we no longer have to keep track of the various versions; D-Tools does it for us automatically. It allows us to keep all of the associated project documentation in a centralized location that can be easily accessed by anyone on our team. Moreover, updates are made in one place but are reflected throughout the system, so it's incredibly efficient."

- Western Carolina University

Project Management

Project Management is the framework that holds a project together and is critical to its overall success. Using System Integrator's project scheduling, resource management and powerful reporting capabilities can help ensure that any job is delivered on time and within budget.

SI facilitates project management by improving communication between not only the system integrator and the client but also with internal team members and external contractors. SI makes it easy to assign tasks to internal installation and programming teams, schedule those tasks in a master project calendar, then communicate those tasks by email, within the software, or via the cloud-based Mobile Install platform. "Because we are able to define users and assign roles relevant to their position, our processes have improved," says Spurr. "We've become more efficient because everyone can access the information they require during any stage of the project."

Additionally, SI lets integrators track labor tasks, installations, and resource scheduling by generating a project work order. SI also provides functionality for creating and managing Service Orders for projects. Consistent use and tracking of work orders used in conjunction with SI's new online project scheduling and resource management tools helps integrators improve the accuracy of product-based labor estimates over time, improving profit margins.

The Link Between Up-to-Date Project Data and Teamwork

The comprehensive product data D-Tools SI offers links the three phases of a project cohesively. Think about it: Although personnel may change and job duties vary between each phase, product specs and equipment lists remain the common denominator between estimation, design, and project management.

When change orders come – as we all know they will – they are easier to track using SI's robust capabilities. "With D-Tools, we now have an efficient and accurate internal communications system that clearly defines and tracks the status of all products for every project," explains Harrison. "We are now tracking change orders more accurately and are getting sign-off for them prior to work commencing, as is required by many of our builder- and architect-managed projects."

Having all this data at your fingertips also makes it easier for security integrators to react to potential issues before they become major problems. Using SI streamlines change orders, scope-of-work adjustments and, most importantly, communications between all personnel. Miscommunication can strain relationships with clients and other contractors and lead to lost time, bad feelings and, potentially, lost future business and referral opportunities.

"D-Tools provides HHS with a more efficient workflow and a solid foundation for the team's internal and external communications," Harrison says, noting that System Integrator's comprehensive Client Reports streamline the sales process, while Change Order reports allow clear and seamless communication with clients once the project is underway. "We now have more comprehensive communications tools at our disposal when working with clients and project stakeholders," he says, adding that better communications and enhanced reports have improved the company's image in the industry.

HHS uses D-Tools SI software to convert proposals into design documents and generate accurate reports for field installation teams, along with purchasing, receiving and accounting departments. "We don't waste time trying to reinvent the wheel every time we have to generate a report or create an invoice," Harrison says. "Thanks to D-Tools, we have more time to focus on the development and growth of our business."

D-Tools System Integrator helps residential and commercial security integrators establish effective business processes for creating estimates and designing and installing systems in every technology field.

- Access Control Systems
- Campus Security
- Electronic Security
- Facility Security Systems
- IP Security Systems
- Physical Security Systems
- Remote Access Systems
- Two-way Voice Communications
- Video Surveillance Systems
- Alarm Security Systems
- CCTV & Intrusion Systems
- Enterprise Security Systems
- Fire and Safety Alarm Systems
- Monitoring Systems
- Sensor Systems
- Remote Video Surveillance

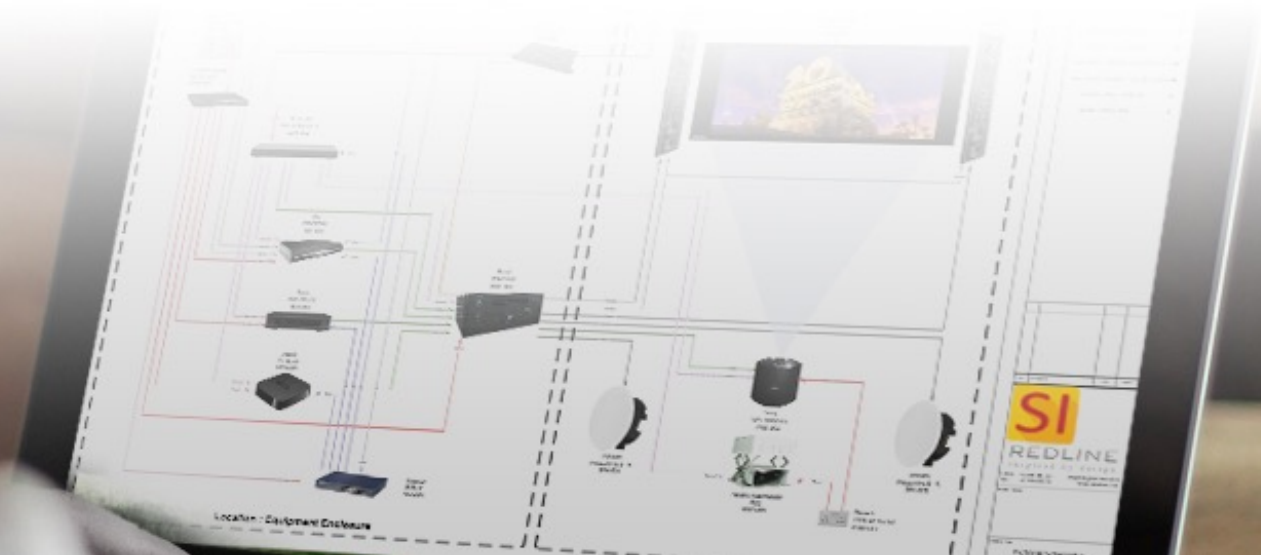
How Top Security Integrators Get Organized with D-Tools

Implementing D-Tools System Integrator creates a dynamic business process that promotes organization by assisting with the initial estimation phase, a method to create clean and concise designs, and a firm basis for security systems project management. Accurate product data that is linked between project phases provides security integrators with a synchronized process to track project elements including equipment, labor, and time management.

Quite simply, no other application offers such continuity across the entire business process, enabling increased efficiencies and revenues, reduced time and costs, and increased overall satisfaction and profitability per project.

“From the beginning, our experience with D-Tools has been extremely positive due to their excellent support staff and training programs that help us manage the intricacies of our business to their highest potential,” says Harrison. “The D-Tools System Integrator software platform is worth every dollar and minute we’ve spent as it has allowed our firm to reap positive long-term benefits.”

Spurr agrees, “D-Tools SI is the only solution we know of that has the capabilities we were looking for. It consistently helps me find a way to accomplish what I want, so Access Technologies can continue to push the envelope and blaze new paths.”



For more information contact sales@d-tools.com or call 1-866-386-6571

