

Comprehending Central Station as a Service

Emerging hybrid and hosted central station services are bringing valuable options to the forefront for security dealers. Find out how and why CSaaS is changing the monitoring landscape.

By Peter Giacalone

This revelation provides the platform to offer endless possibilities to dealers whether they operate their own monitoring operations or not.

It's intriguing how drastically during the past two or three decades a dealer's decision of owning and operating an in-house central station has changed. In the past, such a dealer at times felt pain when facing a competitor that did provide in-house monitoring. As technology progressed, many will argue that the script has flipped.

The advanced, nationwide, third-party central stations inherently offer more services and streamlined communications than most independent centers can justify providing themselves. Certain wholesale centers have done an extraordinary job in leveraging their size to step up their technology and offerings while staying focused on providing personal services. It is a serious job and a big decision on selecting any partner — and identifying a central station partner is one of the biggest decisions a dealer will have to make.

Compounding their comprehensive offerings a select few monitoring companies, along with their central station automation providers, have teamed up to create hosting platforms that have been listed under UL827A. This revelation provides the platform to offer endless possibilities to dealers whether they operate their own monitoring operations or not. It's the new era of central station as a service (CSaaS).

Now, an existing central station or a company seeking to start up a new central station,

can maintain a UL Listed central station of their own while hosting all their technology via a UL827A Listed monitoring center. This not only avoids what could be millions of dollars in capital expenditure costs, it allows for a warm start with tremendous support for the entire operation and a reduction in operational expenses.

Currently UL has listed a handful of central station hosts and host centers. At press time, they are NMC, Rapid Response Monitoring Services and Affiliated Monitoring. The host-only centers are DICE, BOLD Group, Secure Global Solutions (SGS), Innovative Business Software (IBS) and Techevolution.

In some structures the offerings are more comprehensive than a traditional SaaS subscription of the software platform. A select few of these UL827A Listed operations offer options that include telecommunications, customer and technical support, custom development and operator redundancy. Let's take a closer look.

Real-World Hybrid Adoptions

As an advisor to companies considering hosting or refreshing their central station operations or monitoring options, I reached out to a few clients open to sharing their experiences. I selected some of the more challenging structures to highlight, in contrast to less complicated structures that are simpler to structure.

Bermuda Security Group (BSG) — In 2014, BSG, the largest security company on



the island of Bermuda, began considering a technological refresh and upgrade. BSG was founded in 1969 and started providing its own in-house monitoring some years later. After a careful review of what was feasible, along with a comparison to what was available in the marketplace, discussions commenced to forge an alternate path.

Conversations involved BSG's requirement for a monitoring solution that would provide local processing with Cloud-based services. Unlike a domestic dealer within the United States, the challenges for this structure included bridging the international expense of long-distance communications to and from North America. A solution was needed that could provide logistical independence for the company's North Atlantic Island operations with failover support from a large wholesale central station.

After significant deliberation we created a plan, structure and options for the desired central station upgrades and emergency planning. We weighed the differences and possible options of investing in new and enhanced technology, taking a deep dive into under-

standing what these enhancements and upgrades would deliver.

A decision was reached to create an RFP to solicit the thoughts and recommendations from third-party monitoring providers in order to strike a strategic partnership that would meet the goals of BSG. The RFP was distributed to many of North America's large third-party providers for response.

After a lengthy process and many central station site visits, BSG selected Rapid Response Monitoring Services as its third-party partner. The BSG integration leveraged RRMS' technology toward accomplishing its goals. Before this hosting arrangement, BSG maintained its own receivers, AES radio network, AlarmNet, central station automation and PBX telephone system on the island. Our goal was to refresh all the technology and utilize everything the host center had developed and deployed over the years to support its subscriber base.

Avoiding the international challenge of inbound and outbound long-distance calling was essential toward economic feasibility. Along with RRMS Vice President of Technology and Inno-

Currently, UL has listed Affiliated Monitoring (*pictured*), NMC and Rapid Response as central station hosts and host centers.

Management

Central Station as a Service

vation Morgan Hertel, we developed a comprehensive design and structure. It was essential to maintain the central station receivers and AES radio network on the island. This allowed for the radio network to stay intact and the legacy dial-up systems to remain for local calls.

We then decided rather than using the host center PBX as a hosted solution as we would typically do in a structure such as this, we would integrate the BSG on island PBX with the hosted PBX. We had already planned on an MPLS circuit with VPN backup. We then added SIP trunking to the MPLS circuit,

served as another level of redundancy.

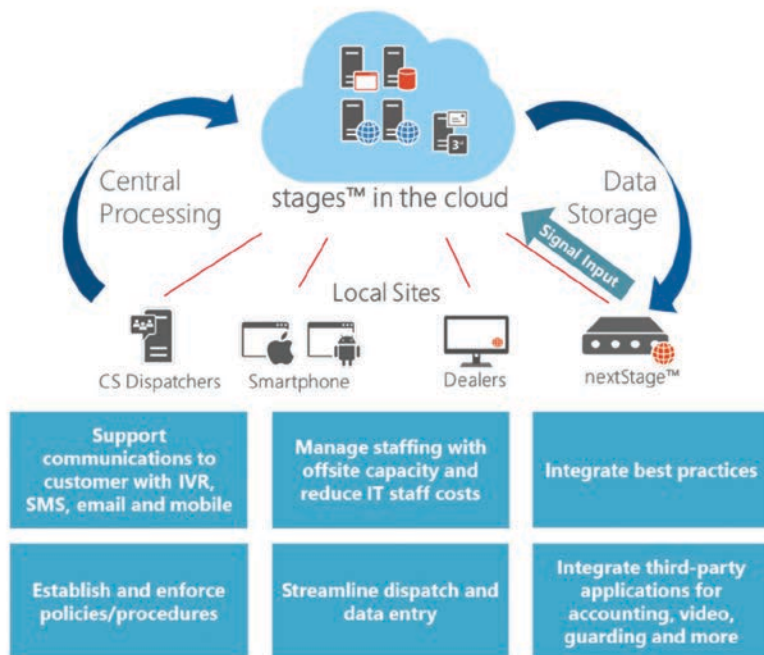
This structure has been in place since 2015 and is rock solid. With some great innovation we designed and adopted a structure that can be duplicated anywhere in the world.

The Security Centre Ltd. (TSCL) — TSCL, the largest security company on Grand Cayman, was once a spoke of the BSG monitoring structure. As TSCL grew and its requirements followed, it caused the company to structure independently. Having the experience with BSG and facing similar challenges, we restructured the TSCL enterprise.

When TSCL CEO Abraham Ghazarian stepped in to lead the organization, he had many choices and his unmatched experience of leading security companies in 92 different countries throughout his career led to many questions, comments and suggestions. Many of the challenges were the same as with the Bermuda structure.

The one difference was that because TSCL was a cutting-edge company, it utilized a hosted UCaaS telephone service. It didn't have a premise-based PBX as most central stations. With some additional design, we worked with the TSCL hosted telephone Cloud provider and integrated the central station PBX with the hosted solution. It was business as usual with the connections and receivers and operations logistics.

Sample Structure of a Hosted Environment



which allowed us to integrate the two disparate PBX systems. This structured allowed for all inbound traffic to remain local as calls were answered through the Rapid PBX and when Rapid dialed out, the PBX integration allowed for dialing local through the on-island PBX. Everything on island remained intact for telecommunications through the long umbilical cord of the MPLS circuit.

The receivers communicated to the hosted stages automation via the MPLS and it was business as usual. To further enhance the operation and to reduce traffic on the MPLS, and most importantly allow for local monitoring during an emergency, we installed a stages next-stage appliance server onsite in Bermuda, which

Decision Process Discussion

Following is a conversation about the hybrid structure with Ghazarian and BSG Chairman & President Herman Tucker.

What was most compelling reason that attracted you to consider the hybrid approach to hosting and central station monitoring?



Herman Tucker: We needed to update our monitoring technology and increase our value proposition of remote services for our subscriber base while gaining greater efficiencies. We realized that technology and services had changed over the years, so we took a clean slate, wholistic approach to reviewing what was available at every level.



Abraham Ghazarian: Staying relevant with the latest in technology for providing the best services for our subscriber base.

When did you first start providing central station monitoring services to your subscriber base, and when did you change your delivery of these services and engage with a host central station?

Tucker: We began in 1980 and changed in 2015.

Ghazarian: We started in 1997, initially with the assistance of BSG. Then changed to directly with our host central station in 2022.

What were some of the advantages gained in making that transition?

Tucker: We were looking for a solution that provided more than just an “answering service.” We also wanted value-added services like technical redundancy and technical resources, both human and state-of-the-art equipment/services. We also did not want to completely divorce ourselves from the client interaction with alarm responses.

Ghazarian: Reduced cost without a third party, improved data resiliency, 24/7 staffed support, full-load monitoring features that include dealer access technology and customer engagement for TSCL staff and our clients.

What are examples of how the hybrid delivery of services has improved offerings?

Tucker: Instant data whenever there is a query or investigation into an event that can be provided to the end user. The ability of an end user to access their information directly if they choose to do so. Also, easy access to our vendor with prompt responses and action.

Ghazarian: Clients are happy to see a local number and it gives them peace of mind, also with a direct number to contact support is a plus.

What are examples on how your new hybrid approach has benefited other areas of your business?

Tucker: Redeployment of resources to other areas of the company toward additional revenue generation.

Ghazarian: From dealing directly with Rapid, we are more in command with getting reports, etc. for clients. Having a direct contact number has improved us being able to get back to our clients in a timely matter. Also, as we recently made the transition directly with Rapid, we will be able to be more valuable to clients as we roll out the marketing plan.

What were some challenges you had to



navigate during your decision process and in migrating to this new platform?

Tucker: Staff redundancies, finding the right partner to provide the hybrid solution, which was not common at the time, and dealing with our clients who were accustomed to speaking with a local operator versus overseas. Many of our clients were on a first name basis with our operators. This was a major issue for a small community. The actual process required logistical planning among us, the partner, and numerous telecommunications and IT service providers. It takes planning and efficient communication and having the right people onsite on “D-Day.”

Ghazarian: The challenges were timeframe related as I didn't know it required so much background work with data, etc. But the team handled it well and as my first opportunity to work with the Rapid team I also learned a lot. In meeting with the team there weren't many hurdles in making the decision.

How did redundancy, diversity, automation platform, value-added services, MEW factor mandates and resiliency of services affect your decision on selecting a host provider?

Tucker: All of them played a factor, but really it boiled down to comfort level and trust that the host provider could deliver what you wanted on time and at a consistently high level. The relationship developed through dialogue, visits to facilities and meeting the people who would be handling the account is very important.

Ghazarian: As for redundancy, this would be considered warm as we have a backup system to our active SurGuard receivers. So with Rapid redundant systems, all their lockstep features

Moving to a hybrid model brought The Security Centre Ltd. reduced cost without a third party, improved data resiliency, 24/7 staffed support and full-load monitoring features.

With some great innovation we designed and adopted a structure than can be duplicated anywhere in the world.

The adoption of UL827A addresses the objective of maintaining a UL-Listed central station while partnering.

were considered and played a factor. During the peak period of COVID, the monitoring center faced a staffing shortage and compensated that with automated event notification. This demonstrated resilience and creative problem solving. It was essential keeping us informed of this change to give us an opportunity to communicate to our end users.

Anything else to add related to your hybrid transformation?

Tucker: It's one of the best decisions I ever made. The delay was purely related to employee preservation; however, due to lack of consistency in maintaining standards, the operation became a liability. It is now an asset.

Ghazarian: The economic factor combined with years of experience and redundancy makes this hybrid model an ideal solution that offers competitive advantages.

CSaaS Comes of Age

I have advised and helped structure similar scenarios with additional large UL-Listed, U.S.-

based clients. Some had existing operations and a few initially wanted to build their own central station. With the handful of competent and leading-edge host central stations, it's hard to justify anyone going at this alone. The changes and what's available have changed profoundly.

The maturity of the industry, platforms and competencies have created tremendous opportunities that address virtually every need and objective of anyone considering upgrading or building a central station. The adoption of UL827A addresses the objective of maintaining a UL-Listed central station while partnering. When you also consider the UL MEW mandate for redundancy, that partnering becomes a logical decision. The capital expenditure and operational expenditure reductions along with improving the tech stack really bring the proposition of leveraging hosted services and hybrid monitoring full circle. **SSI**

Peter Giacalone is President of Giacalone Associates, an independent security consulting firm serving central stations, manufacturers and dealers.