

Securing the future Networked policing in New Zealand

WEDNESDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2006
RUTHERFORD HOUSE • 25 LAMBTON QUAY • WELLINGTON

Police Act Review and Victoria University of Wellington's School of Government

PRESENTATION BY Scott Carter Chairman, NZ Security Association

Introduction

Networked policing, co-operative policing, pluralisation of policing – whatever you call it and wherever you look internationally, it is gathering momentum.

Why? Because police forces around the world face common problems of budgetary constraints, limited resources, intense public scrutiny and high public expectation. Whether consumer-driven, media-driven, or factually linked to objective indicators of rising crime rates and highly publicised policing failures, the perception remains that government-provided services are failing to give the public the reassurance that they seek.

With the growth of security firms at least equal to (and often far greater than) any increases in police per capita numbers, the obvious innovation is the privatisation of some police functions. Just as in health and education, public demand for protection is increasingly being supplied by the market.

There is thus a blurring of distinctions between private and public policing responsibilities and accountabilities, as the two groups perform many of the same tasks.

The challenge is meeting public law enforcement expectations through the use of cost effective, “on demand” resources of accredited private security providers while retaining the authority, independence and impartiality of needs-based state policing. The answer probably lies somewhere amongst giving freedom to natural market forces and the implementation of appropriate oversight mechanisms.

International Trends & the New Zealand Perspective

It would be wonderful if all New Zealanders were able to live in an environment where their actions and reactions to security were not driven or at least underpinned by fear. But the reality is that this is never going to happen so we are all tasked with the role of minimising the impact of that fear by ensuring that we do as much as possible to eliminate risk.

We can begin by consciously acknowledging that private policing is already here, and will continue to become part of the New Zealand landscape. Let us be clear about what this entails, and what it could mean to us.

By private policing I mean the various lawful forms of “for profit” manpower protection services, including what we refer to as the security industry.

In our small corner of the world we have a tendency to think private policing belongs in such countries as South Africa and the United States, yet in societies broadly similar to ours such as the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia it is also a prominent feature of policing. In fact, it is becoming the dominant provider of security to the community.

In the United States, the ratio of private security officers to sworn police is now 4:1. In Australia, it is at least 3:1 and in New Zealand it is fast approaching 1:1, with well over 8,000 Certificates of Approval (or individual security licences) now current.

Over the past ten years there has been a huge public uptake in residential monitored alarm systems. Electronic protection for homes is here to stay. In

addition, increased demand is evident for new technologies such as biometrics, or new applications of existing technologies as they become more affordable and commonplace; particularly video surveillance and complete building management systems.

Other industry activities include vehicle immobilisation, site security officers, patrolling of business districts and residential suburbs, document destruction, cash in transit protection, prisoner escorts, event and venue security.

With this rapid expansion, the public is accepting that safer communities cannot be just the responsibility of the public police. This has led to the success of companies like ADT Armourguard and First Security, who have contracted security arrangements with local government in the central business districts of Auckland and Wellington; Red Badge, who provide security services at many of our sports stadia, other companies who specialise in protecting shopping malls, and Matrix Security, who pioneered residential and commercial suburban patrols in Auckland.

Increasingly, there exists operational interaction between such companies and the public police. It is commonplace, for example, for informal but direct communication to take place between the police helicopters or dog units and Matrix Security patrol cars as they network resources to apprehend offenders.

Advantages and Limitations of Market Forces

New Zealand's security industry, like any other, is driven by market forces, especially that of consumer choice. There exists a mix of large and small security firms, leading to extreme competition and vigorous rivalry. Many security goods and services have become commoditised. With the costs of switching suppliers usually very low or non-existent, the power of the consumer is significant.

Entrepreneurial companies, especially those focused on quality market offerings, have risen to the top. As innovators they endeavour to steer the market away from price sensitivity towards their differentiated services or recognised brands.

However, in the absence of significant barriers to entry, little effective enforcement of licensing and no mandatory training or base operating standards, some price-driven operators can and do unfairly damage the reputation of the security industry.

So what can we conclude consumers are wanting from the security industry? Do they want cheap products and services or those of quality? As with any other market I believe this boils down to a fair value proposition.

There is little end-value in a security service that fails to live up to the most rudimentary standard, and bottom-end security providers are usually rejected by the market in the medium term.

There is no doubt however that affordability is a key purchasing driver. But for most consumers, the ability to meet their expectations of immediacy (i.e. "I want it now") or make choices on the quantity and quality of security arrangements that most satisfies them are the dominant buying motives. When a home owner sees someone breaking into a car in their street they want a fast, effective response – and preferably the offender caught. And increasingly they are prepared to pay for that.

While the public have generally accepted responsibility for security arrangements for their homes and businesses, they have developed similar expectations for the state policing of their suburbs and open spaces. It is arguably impossible to cost-effectively maintain a police force large enough to satisfy those expectations.

Advantages of outsourced policing include far greater resourcing and responsiveness to "on demand" requirements; thus going some way to meeting the public's immediacy expectation.

However, market failure remains a risk to the concept of networked policing, and issues exist around consistency of standards, moderated training and accountability.

For example, as evidenced in the building industry, without accepted minimum performance criteria there will always be fringe operators that do not invest in recognised training or comply with generally accepted practise; seeking only pass themselves off as legitimate businesses regardless of whether they mislead the public over their performance capability. If training standards themselves vary from one part of the country to another then there again exists the potential for the consumer to be misled.

There are clear roles for the state to play, both in ensuring that New Zealand never evolves entirely into “chequebook policing” and in ensuring the public can have confidence in the choice of their private security arrangements.

At present, security industry legislation, licensing and enforcement are hopelessly inadequate and the government needs to recognise the urgency around addressing this.

The New Zealand Security Association

The role of the New Zealand Security Association is one of leadership and advocacy. We understand how the security industry can add value to policing. We have long recognised that if we wish to advance our businesses and move into other areas where we are able to work in partnership with the police, we need to be widely acknowledged as being accountable, responsible and transparent.

Although membership of our Association is not mandatory, we set industry operating standards for many activities through written Codes of Practise, and now ensure compliance with those standards from our members through independent audits. Through the Security Industry Training Advisory Board we have worked with the ETITO to develop NZQA-recognised qualifications for front-line security officers.

Acknowledging that voluntary membership of our Association and market forces by themselves cannot regulate critical aspects of industry performance, we have

also been lobbying the government for several years for improvements to industry legislation, licensing and enforcement.

To deliver on public safety and confidence we believe in establishing a form of accreditation for professional security businesses that provides transparency and accountability. In particular, it should recognise commitments to formal training, auditable qualifications, and best practise in both operational and health and safety practises.

Policing of Mass Open Spaces

While many people still think of security guards as overweight guys who do bank sentry duties until they can get a “real” job, the reality is now very different. Uniformed security officers provide crime control and public order services in many of the places we live and work – from shopping malls to sports stadia, commercial districts to gated communities, and even public parks and streets. In fact, there is a recognised link between the growth of the security industry and the emergence of “mass private property” (such as malls) that are privately owned but functionally public, or quasi-public. Where engaged by local government, security officers also effectively police public parks, beaches and recreational areas.

Exactly what constitutes “policing” is now a contested issue, and with that come issues around the proper balance of burdens, regulatory frameworks, accountabilities and controls. Many private security officers possess no greater legal capabilities than do ordinary citizens to detain persons who are suspected of or who have committed a crime, yet such officers are legally able and occupationally disposed to use coercive powers that an ordinary citizen may rarely, if ever, invoke.

Many are authorised to act as agents of property owners, and can act upon this authority to exclude or eject undesirable persons from malls, sports stadia and other mass open spaces.

Tens of thousands of shoppers visit each of our shopping malls on any given day, and more often than not it is privately contracted security officers who provide the visible policing presence. They are the ones first called upon to deal with thefts, assaults, drunkenness, medical emergencies, lost children and more.

Large sports events, in particular, contain the potentially explosive mix of crowds, high emotion and alcohol. They can also become soft targets for extremist groups. Policing such events is challenging, whether simply limiting unruly behaviour or ensuring public safety in the face of mass protest, fire or terrorist attack.

In only five year's time, New Zealand is hosting one of the world's greatest sporting events - the 2011 Rugby World Cup. With such mega-events, police services are invariably under resource pressures due to normal community and law enforcement commitments. There is always a requirement for the procurement of significant private security resources, as a number of the security functions can be performed at professional levels by private security without diverting the public sector resources from more important law enforcement roles.

To make the 2011 Rugby World Cup a success, we need to act now. A decision on the right stadium would help! But equally we need to work towards a policing framework that will appropriately secure the event and provide New Zealand's community security needs well into the future.

Conclusions

Most crime is local crime and it is local people and security businesses that will have the greatest impact on reducing the crime rate in their communities.

As a profession we can add huge value to our communities through the strength of our relationship with the police.

As a country we need to

- recognise that networked policing is already here

- review security industry legislation in concert with the review of the Police Act
- achieve balance between the effects of market forces and effective state legislation and controls through appropriate oversight mechanisms, including a form of accreditation for professional security providers
- formalise partnerships between police and accredited security businesses.

Notwithstanding the obvious differences between state law enforcement and private enterprise, our goals are the essentially similar to those of the police. When it comes down to the detail, both public and private police have a singular focus on making our communities safer by reducing crime.

ENDS