BUYERS GUIDE TO SECURITY SERVICES
INTRODUCTION

These days many organisations engage their Procurement department to help select their supplier of security services. As part of this, there is also a tendency to focus on the day-rate as a metric for comparing the different suppliers. With the greatest respect to Procurement professionals, we think this is an approach that rewards the wrong kind of behaviour, and so will fail to find you the supplier you are looking for. But before you spit your coffee all over your keyboard and stop reading, bear with us whilst we try and explain our reasoning behind this statement.

Firstly though, let us start by confessing that we do have a vested interest: Corsaire favours an honest, transparent approach to pricing our services, which puts us at a disadvantage when it comes to simple day-rate comparison. Nevertheless, this document isn’t about self-justification; this is a genuine attempt to provide some insight into the way that security services are packaged and procured, so that an informed decision can be made. If at the end you still want to buy the cheapest day-rate, then obviously that is your prerogative; but at least you’ll do it with a better understanding of your choice!

WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS DONE

There is a business management principal called, “what gets measured gets done.” It’s the force at play when the NHS insists doctors must see a patient within 48 hours of calling the surgery. To comply with this, the surgery won’t allow you to book an appointment a week in advance, which also means that to get an appointment when you do need one, you have to join the hundreds of others in the hold queue from the moment the phone lines open. In this example, the behaviour you see is due to measuring the wrong thing; a metric intended to improve customer satisfaction actually does entirely the opposite. This is exactly what we think happens when an organisation focuses on the day-rate in isolation.

We think that what you are actually looking to achieve is a good balance between the value you receive from the services, and the overall costs you pay for them; which has much less to do with the day-rate than you might think.

THE DAY-RATE FALLACY

In the world of consultancy there are only two components that influence the price you pay for a day of a consultant’s time: the first is the cost of the consultant, and the second is the proportion of the consultant’s time allocated to chargeable work. So for example, if the consultant costs £100 a year to employ, and only works 5 chargeable days, then they must be charged out at a minimum of £20 per day to break even. If they work 3 days, this rises to £33 per day; conversely, if they work 10 days, then it falls to £10 per day.

In summary, to reduce the day-rate significantly, either a cheaper consultant must be used (which has obvious implications in terms of their relative level of skills and experience), or more of their time must become chargeable.
Now, obviously you should expect every supplier to say that they are brilliant; it goes with the territory. However, what you may not expect is for us to suggest that you ignore the flowery words, and instead put us to the test. We strongly believe that, as the time-honoured truism goes, “the proof of the pudding is in the eating”. So as such, we think that you will only be able to truly evaluate what a supplier can do for you by trying their wares in a realistic scenario.

We would suggest that you include a “bake-off” as a standard part of your procurement process. Choose a simple, internal application to test, invite the supplier to send a single member of staff to your office for a few days of testing, and then evaluate their process and output objectively.

**LAST BUT NOT LEAST: QUALITY**

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**IN SUMMARY**

As part of your procurement process, try to include the following components:

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| Comparative quote | Provide a simple scope to quote against, and then evaluate the response. For example:  
- Infrastructure Assessment of 10 IP addresses;  
- Web Application Assessment of a single, authenticated application consisting of 30 dynamic pages, and 2 user roles;  
- Presentation of results;  
- Retest of issues;  
- Project to be delivered onsite in Cardiff  
Compare the responses: what is charged separately, and what is inclusive? How long is the postponement & cancellation window? How many man days are required, in comparison to other quotes? |
| Bake-off | Provide a simple internal application to test. Invite your suppliers to each send a single member of staff for several days of onsite testing, and then objectively evaluate the final project deliverable.  
Is it clear and concise? Have they found all the issues within the environment? Do they take time to explain the issues thoroughly and convey business impacts in a comprehensible fashion? Are they presentable and affable? |