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Q&A: William Peel, Datawatch Systems

During Hurricane Sandy, **Datawatch Systems** was monitoring the storm from its headquarters in Bethesda, Md. The commercial office building access control system provider wasn't worried about losing power—not with three generators, two phone systems and other redundant backup systems, said **William Peel**, ceo.

As the storm unfolded, Datawatch updated its Hurricane Watch website for the buildings it manages that were in the strike zone with the aim of letting owners and tenants know if their building was open and if there was any damage. "We have TV screens in our central station and we have emergency teams on the ground," Peel said.

William Peel

The company's reach is more than just its Hurricane and Tornado Watch services: it also provides remote access and support to tenants for a range of issues that include accessing the buildings, re-setting elevators and support in the event of an unexpected leak or fire. The company manages more than 2,250 buildings in the U.S. and globally.

What is the bird's eye view of Datawatch Systems?

Let's take it from the front door. We provide access in full to office buildings – the card reader you come through the lobby with, the elevator you ride up to your office in and the door that you enter your office space through. We provide the card readers, the technology and the support for tenants and building owners.

If you were to go to your office building on the weekend without your card and you work in a building with no live guards, you can pick up an outside phone, call our central station, provide a password and we can open the door for you remotely.

What are the different levels of service?

You can do a base building level and get access control to the lobby of a building. Floor-level access is a different level and office suites are a different level. A lot of national tenants will use us for all of the buildings so that tenants can access all locations in the U.S. with one card.

The price range is very broad and has to do with the size of a building, its population and entry points. It's a moving target and no building is priced the same. That being said, costs usually range from about $1,000 to $30,000 a month.

New York and much of the East Coast was recently hit hard by Hurricane Sandy, with power out to many commercial offices in Lower Manhattan. What can Datawatch Systems do in a situation like that?

One of the buildings that we manage, 148 Lafayette Street, is still without power and can't be occupied right now. But tenants can see information about its status and the owner can get updates on what is going on from our website.

In situations like this, sometimes the owner will want to unlock the building during the day and lock it up again at night. We secure the space manually when electric locks have failed but in some cases, the building is on a generator. Often, a building owner will contact us for support. For example, they will call, text or email to say that they need a wet vac to deal with flooding and we will handle that.

We're used to situations where there is no power in a building. In Florida, with Hurricane Irene, office buildings in downtown Miami had their antennas ripped off so there was no phone service and the first floors filled with water so there was no power. We become the director in that situation and had our people on site.

As much as people love technology, they also hate it when it malfunctions. How do you resolve issues when there is a glitch in the system?

When there is a glitch in the system, it usually refers to a programming issue that is caused by either Datawatch or offsite. If you can't get to where you need to go, there is always a way to contact Datawatch and we can resolve the issue remotely. If the elevator isn't working, maybe it needs to be re-set – we can do that from our operations desk because our goal is fixing the problem and getting the tenant into the building.

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