

A Beginner's Guide to Home Security Systems

An introduction to the basic concepts and arguments for owning a home security system.

By Intruder Prevention

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Introduction

What is this e-book about?

As the title states, this is a beginner's guide to the sometimes complicated field of home security. There aren't any tricks and this isn't one long sales pitch. This e-book was created to take an honest look at home security systems. Basic scenarios have been created to help educate the reader.

There are many different ways you can secure a home from intruders. A two thousand dollar state-of-the-art security system may protect your home just as well as a cheap \$300 do-it-yourself kit. The real answer lies with you and how comfortable you feel with your security situation and solution.

This e-book is about informing the reader of different security options.

Do you need a security system?

To answer this question thoughtfully, you need to take a look at yourself and your living situation. To do that, I would ask these questions:

- Do you have a family living with you?
- Do you have any small children living with you?
- Do you have any pets?
- Do you have any valuable belongings?
- Most importantly, do you feel safe at night lying in bed?

Except for the last one, answering "yes" to any of those questions means you'll most likely want to investigate owning some type of a security system.

I already have a gun!

Having a firearm is an excellent idea, but it doesn't mean that you don't need a security system.

Remember that the gun only works if somebody is able to point it at the intruder *and* possibly pull the trigger. It doesn't work if you're asleep in bed or away from your home.

Using a gun against an intruder also means a great deal of stress and responsibility. Could you handle holding somebody at gunpoint until the police arrive? Are you ready to do the final act of shooting and possibly killing a person should they become violent and threaten you or your family?

What about having a dog?

It's still argued today that if you have a dog, then for the most part you shouldn't need a security system. After all, most dogs bark at intruders and can successfully scare them away. Having a growling German shepherd on the other side of the door is an excellent type of criminal deterrence. What kind of person would want to challenge a dog like that?

Some large, well trained dogs make excellent companions and security guards. Their faithful allegiance is told time and time again. It's common to find news articles about dogs going against all odds to save the life of a family member, even if it means their own death. That kind of heroism and determination is simply amazing.

The problem is that there will always be ways to get around a guard dog. Here are a few reasons:

- Dogs can be bribed to stay quiet. A dog treat, chewing gum or even a little peanut butter can go a long way. You may even make a friend out of the guard dog.
- Dogs can be put down with a gunshot or severe beating with a stick or crowbar.
- Dogs are not always on guard 24x7x365. A dog cannot guard your home when it's out on a walk or visiting the veterinarian.
- Dogs may spend the night in a cage or isolated room. Intruders aren't as fearful of trapped dogs.

Dogs are great for barking at intruders and showing force. The barking is loud, fearsome and should easily alert everybody in the house. But despite all of that, can you still count on a dog protecting your home at all hours every day?

Types of security systems

When considering a security system, there's an important question you need to consider before proceeding. Do you want the intruder to be detected inside or outside your home? If you want the intruder detected while still outside your home, then you need to consider a perimeter security system. If you'd rather catch the burglar inside, then you'll want to stick with an interior system.

That seems like a no-brainer question, but there's logic and reasoning between both choices.

Perimeter system

As noted above, this is a system that is alarmed before the intruder enters your home. This type of system relies heavily on the usage of door contacts, window contacts and glass break detectors. The moment somebody opens a door or window, or breaks glass, then the alarm is activated.

Example:

Now put yourself in the intruder's shoes. You managed to sneak up to a home and quietly defeated a deadbolt lock. Just as you're slowly swinging open the door the alarm starts blaring. You haven't even made it a step into the home and you've already been detected. The police are probably being dispatched right now. Is it time to continue into the house and grab some stuff, or should you just get out of there as fast as possible without getting caught?

As you can probably guess, most burglars would rather stay on the run and live to burglarize another day (or night). The odds of that burglar returning again are between slim and none.

There are two main problems with using just a perimeter system: the cost and the size of the system.

1) Cost. The cost is a big factor with this system. Each door and window contact costs money. Each glass break detector also costs money. Start counting all of the outside windows and doors (second floor windows too!), and multiply that by about \$25. That'll give you a good ballpark to start thinking about a perimeter system. A good security company will have a package deal and include a number of contacts for free, but that depends on where you live and the local companies near you.

2) Size. The size of the system is another factor. This will depend on your security system's main control box, the control panel and your personal preference. If you want to know where the intruder is breaking into your home (either by the room or the actual doors/windows), then each set of windows needs to be in its own zone.

Zone 1 may be for the front door, Zone 2 for the living room windows, Zone 3 for the garage door, etc. A general rule of thumb is that most systems can handle between eight and ten zones. Otherwise, it's going to need a zone expander or two to handle the size of your system. The system's control panel needs to be advanced enough to be able to know about the zones and let you know exactly where the trouble is being reported. Again, not every system has to be this way. This is your own preference.

The good thing is that if need be all of the windows and doors can be combined into the same zone. When the alarm goes off the system won't tell you exactly where in the house it is, but it'll still work. If your home is monitored it will still report the alarm to the monitoring agency. The only difference is that you have to guess which entry point the burglar used.

Interior system

This type of security system is designed to “trap” intruders on the inside of your home. As opposed to the perimeter system with all of its door and window contacts, the interior system mainly relies on the use of motion detectors. As the name implies, the intruder needs to be inside the building before any alarms are sounded.

Believe it or not, but there are two main reasons on why it’s an advantage using an interior security system: simplicity and cost.

1) Simplicity. A security system based on using motion detectors is usually fairly basic and simple to install. Using the detector’s wide field of view and ability to use line-of-sight, you can create “secure zones” such as hallways, garages and stairwells. The far range and wide field of view gives a large square footage area of protection.

2) Cost. Generally, a security system mainly composed of motion detectors is substantially cheaper than using contacts in every door and window. Most security companies charge between \$50 and \$100 for additional motion detectors. A home that would need 15-20 contacts may only need two or three motion detectors to provide protection.

Example:

Again, let’s put ourselves in a burglar’s shoes and do another example. You managed to sneak up to the dark side of a home and found a window in the shadows. The window is easily forced open and you’re standing in the dining room. Seeing nothing of value you creep into the hallway and make your way to the family / entertainment room. After taking a step or two, all of a sudden the

alarm sounds. Somebody turns on an upstairs light and you hear footsteps. Are you going to stay around for a while and do some looting, or is it time to get out before anybody can recognize you?

It's important to note that there are three main disadvantages to using an interior system: inside only, modes of operations and pets.

1) Inside only. The first problem was noted in the previous example. The intruder has to be inside the house before the alarm is sounded. Many people consider that idea revolting. They want that extra feeling of security by not allowing the intruder inside without being detected. This is especially true for families with small children or expensive possessions.

2) Modes of operation. The next problem is that the motion detectors are not to be used when you're home and moving around the rooms. The best times to use the detectors are when you're away or asleep. This may not be adequate protection if you're living in a high crime area.

3) Pets. This is the main reason that animal owners stay away from using motion detectors. Different companies handle dogs with one of two different ways. First, they may use a special pet motion detector. These detectors need the animal to weigh at least 80 pounds before they're detected. This allows most of the larger breeds of dogs to safely move around the home without setting off the alarms. The other method companies may use is to turn a regular motion detector upside down. This creates a small corridor near the floor so the pets can pass without detection. What if an intruder were to also stay low to the floor?

The other problem with pets and motion detectors involves ordinary house cats. It's a well known fact that cats love to jump onto furniture, bookshelves and other higher places. The jumping is what is noticed by the detector, and it's treated as if an intruder was in the room. Even people with pet motion detectors have reported false alarms because of their pet cat. The best way to use motion detectors while having a pet cat is to keep the cat contained in a different room while the detectors are active.

Which type of security system is best?

The answer to this question lies with you and your protection needs.

Generally, a perimeter system is better for those with:

- Small children
- Expensive merchandise
- High crime area
- Large budget
- Desire to keep the intruder on the outside of the home

An interior system is better for those:

- Constantly away out of the home
- Large, open rooms
- Older or no children
- Smaller budget

Hybrids

It's common for many people to develop a combination of the two types of security systems. They may want the exterior protection for certain areas or doorways, but only want the interior protection for a few other areas of their home.

Example:

For a two story home, the homeowner may want contacts on each exterior door, window contacts on the front windows, a glass break detector in the kitchen (for the windows and sliding glass door), and motion detectors by the front stairs and in the garage. This way there's a solid perimeter defense for the obvious entry points, and the other critical areas are protected by the motion detectors. Should

a burglar still break into the home, they're not going to make it up the stairs or into the garage without being detected.

Professional company versus Do-It-Yourself (DIY)

If you're handy with basic electronics and don't want your security system monitored by a company, then you may want to look into building your own security system. It's fairly easy to get started with a basic kit (available in most electronic shops) and then add-on whatever extra components are necessary. This is cheaper than buying a system from a security company and you have the freedom to design the system any way you want.

The only major downside is that should you want the system monitored in the future, many security companies will not monitor a system that was not installed by a professional installer. You may be required to have a technician examine your system, or possibly have it replaced entirely with one of their systems.

Most of the professional companies offer special package deals for the different sizes and styles of security systems. With all of the different equipment and types of sensors available, a professional company should be able to handle all of your security concerns.

The major companies commonly offer product warranties and satisfaction guarantees should anything go wrong. Competition from the different national and local security companies can often work to your advantage. Bidding wars and extra bonuses throw into the package will make you the winner in the end.

If you're planning on doing business with a major security company, be prepared to sign a service contract. Most companies offer the industry standard three year

contract, and there are penalties for early termination. Also, be ready for the visit from the company sales representative. Most representatives work on a commission-only salary and are always eager to add extra features that may not be needed. What sounds good there on the spot may possibly be a waste of money after it's installed.

Tip:

Go ahead and meet with a few different security representatives. Be honest when telling them about your security concerns, and see how each one can address the different situations. ***Do not verbally commit to anything or sign any agreements!*** If the estimates are within your price range, don't do anything and wait until near the end of the month (very important). Call the reps and start a bidding war between the companies for your business. If a sales rep (or a company) is having a lousy month in sales, they'll be extra willing to compete and earn your business.

Local versus national security companies

When choosing a security company, one of the biggest debates is whether to go with a local or national company. Some people prefer the feeling of doing business with its headquarters in their town, while others want the experience and national spotlight from a prestigious national company. There's no definite answer on which type of company is better for protecting your home.

Local company

A local company is one that operates in the local area or region. This type of company has excellent knowledge of the local area and customs, and they can easily specialize in certain types of security. Generally, a local company can offer cheaper installation and monitoring prices. Installations are usually able to be scheduled within a few working days.

One of the downsides is that the technology may not be up to par as with a national company. The smaller companies have smaller budgets and may not be able to access all of the fancy modern day equipment like their national competitors. The other downside is for the actual monitoring itself. A few of the local companies do their own in-house monitoring, but most of them let another company handle their monitoring. It may be where one monitoring center monitors security systems from several different local companies.

National company

A national company is one that operates throughout the entire country. These are companies constantly in the news media and need to be extra careful to keep their images clean. Customer service is readily available through one of their 24x7x365 call centers, and if needed, service representatives can make house calls that day. Most of the companies offer high-tech and brand new security technology guaranteed to detect the sneakiest of intruders.

Most of the national companies own their own monitoring center, and a few of them own multiple centers. Having multiple monitoring centers means that a company has unrestricted 24x7x365 monitoring abilities. Should one center go down for technical reasons, the customers usually monitored in that center are

distributed amongst the remaining centers. *What do you suppose happens when a local company's monitoring center goes down?*

Being with a national company also offers you the chance to stay with them should you have to move to a new area. There's no need to break a contract and pay any early termination fees. Depending on the company, you may receive a free or heavily discounted security system in your new location.

One of the biggest disadvantages of being with a national company is the overall higher pricing. The prestige of being with a top-notch company with the latest technology comes at a higher price.

Other security accessories

Today's society is proving that at times, just having a home security system isn't enough to protect your home. It's necessary to go further a few extra steps to help ensure that nobody messes with you or your family. One or several of these accessories can greatly reduce the chances of having an intruder.

Floodlights

This is one of the simplest yet most effective means of preventing a nighttime intruder. There are two elements that night intruders hate the most: light and noise. Lighting up darkened areas brings unwanted attention to them, and they'll quickly retreat back to the shadows.

If possible, mount a floodlight on each side of your home. This will create a "barrier of light" and make it very difficult for somebody to approach your home unnoticed. If budget is an issue, focus on lighting the back of the house and the driveway / garage area. Neighborhood homes usually have streetlights and well lighted front lawns, whereas the back and garage areas are usually dark. Trees and bushes make it even darker.

80% of intruders break in through a door. Always make sure that each of your exterior doors is illuminated on the outside. If somebody wants to break into your home that way, make them stand in the light and be seen by your neighbors.

Deadbolts

A deadbolt is a necessity for every exterior door. Ordinary locking doorknobs can easily be defeated by carding, prying or lock picking, but a deadbolt will add an extra element of security to your home. Each **visible** (important!) security device will convince more and more intruders to stay away from your home.

As mentioned above, each exterior door needs to have a deadbolt installed. Having a deadbolt only on your front door means that an intruder is going to walk around your home to a less secure side door. Remember that intruders commonly look for the easiest way into homes. If that means entering through an unsecured garage or kitchen door, then that's the route they'll most likely take.

Deadbolts that you can lock and unlock from the outside come in two styles – single and double cylinder. A single cylinder deadbolt uses a turnpiece on the inside, but needs a key on the outside. A double cylinder deadbolt requires the use of a key both inside and outside to lock/unlock the door. **If you have windows on or next to the door, then do not use a single cylinder deadbolt!** It's too easy for a criminal to break the glass, reach inside and turn the turnpiece to unlock the door.

Some people are afraid of using a double cylinder deadbolt because of the fact that you need to use a key inside the house. If there was a fire or emergency, they don't want to have to hunt for the key. An easy solution is to hang a spare key on a wall near the door, but well out of arm's reach from the closest window. If your home has small children, then make sure the key is low enough for them to reach in an emergency. Practice using the key a few times and you'll see just how easy and much more secure it is than with a single cylinder deadbolt.

NOTE – Having an outside accessible deadbolt does not guarantee that burglars cannot break into your home. Like most locks, they can be defeated with a little time and practice. What they do is buy you extra time should an intruder attempt to challenge your security devices. The longer it takes an intruder to defeat your locks, then the less likely it is that they'll make it into your home without being noticed. Deadbolts also deter some intruders and keep the novice ones away from your home.

Another type of deadbolt is an interior accessible deadbolt. These are “one-sided” deadbolts that you can only access from the inside of your home. That type of lock is excellent for unused side doors, or for your main door once you're home for the evening. With no part of the lock being outside your door, it's extremely difficult for an intruder to break in through that door.

Cellular back-up

Security companies monitor security systems through the telephone lines. Without those lines, the monitoring center will not be able to receive any trouble codes from your alarm. Your alarm will still go off and the siren will sound during a break-in, but the monitoring company won't know about it.

Take a look outside your home and see if your telephone line is exposed. It commonly runs down the side of the building before going underground to the nearest junction box. The problem is that it's very easy for a criminal to cut that exposed part to disrupt the connection. Many criminals know about that flaw, and those daring enough to rob your home will take advantage of it.

Criminals aren't the only element that can cut the phone wire. Ice storms, heavy wind and even construction crews can accidentally bring down the wires too.

Would you still feel protected knowing that it could be a few days before the connection is restored again?

If it's available through your security company, you may want to invest in a cellular back-up system. This device simultaneously broadcasts your security information to the monitoring center through the cellular frequencies. Should the phone lines go down for any reason, you'll still be monitored with the cellular back-up unit. As long as you live within range of a cell phone tower then you'll be monitored.

It's becoming more common for people to use cell phones instead of land lines in their home. With this advance in technology and convenience, more and more security companies will be offering the cellular broadcasting devices. It's certainly possible that in the near future all home security systems will be monitored this way.

NOTE – There is a security flaw with the cellular back-up devices. There are hand held cellular blocking devices available online. Through the use of one of those devices it's conceivable that an intruder can temporarily block the cellular signals around your home, and thus stop the connection between your security system and the monitoring center. The cellular blockers are illegal to sell and possess in the United States, and right now they're still relatively unknown amongst criminals. The odds of a criminal using it are very low, but it is a very real threat to the system.

Final thoughts

Home security is now considered a critical part of today's society. Whether you're renting an apartment or you own your own home, intruders and burglars *can* strike where you live. Today's society is more dangerous than ever, and it's your responsibility to protect yourself and those you love.

It's mind-boggling to analyze and prevent every single way an intruder can enter a building. As criminals become better educated through their peers, more and more of them will find ways around locked doors and motion detectors. This guide is intended to give you a better idea of some of the more basic concepts in home security and ways to protect against more of the novice or simple-minded burglars. If somebody is desperate enough to break into your home, they will find a way to do so.

The best weapon in home security is willpower. From learning about current burglary tactics to doing a complete security review of your home to taking the necessary actions to prevent an intrusion, willpower is what will help you from becoming a crime statistic.

Do the right thing and take preventative actions today. Even something as simple as adding timers to your lights could prevent a burglar from selecting your home. Ignoring this problem does not make it go away!

Additional information

For additional information regarding home security, I recommend visiting the website Intruder Prevention (<http://www.intruderprevention.com>). There you'll find updated articles focusing on current security devices and tactics used by intruders. You'll also find additional information and videos relating to the topics in this e-book.

This website is absolutely free. There isn't even a registration process. This is funded by the sponsors that appear throughout the website.

Future plans for the website include:

- personal safety
- computer safety
- college safety
- an interactive forum to discuss safety and security topics

This website is a “work-in-progress” and will be constantly updated over time. As new information and videos are discovered they will be added to the website.

Thank you for reading this e-book! This is the first in a series of safety and security e-books that I'll be publishing. If you have any comments, please send me an e-mail at webmaster@intruderprevention.com

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