Absenteeism

One of the biggest revelations in the Smithsonian Institution’s findings might also be the least surprising: unfilled posts and absenteeism are exceedingly more common for in-house guards than for contract security guards. The reasons are simple enough. Contract security companies have full staffs and procedures for last-minute shift replacement. When someone calls in sick at a contract security company, it is well within reason to fill the post with another trained security professional.

But the absentee disparity is huge. According to the study, museums using proprietary security over contractors are 9.5 times more likely to have absent posts.

Supervisory staff had to be used to fill posts 3.5 days out of the month for in-house security guards.
Cost

Cost is likely the first thing that comes to mind when you hear of a museum switching from proprietary to contract security. Unsurprisingly, in this study, 54 percent of respondents reported that cost is a major reason for contracting. So in what ways does switching save museums money?

According to one interviewee, contract security is incredibly competitive, partly because of an industry-wide willingness to accept smaller profit margins, often well under 10 percent.

Here are the main cost reasons why many museums choose contract security:

- ACA compliance
- Pensions and retirement
- Rising employee taxes
- Uniforms and equipment
- Training

Quality Control

Regarding reasons for using contract security, one respondent said a major reason is to “provide a consistent presence at posts, to have officers who are least trained at a basic level, and the ability to provide reasonable specifications for the officers’ quality.”

Quality is never something to be taken lightly. When organizations rely on in-house security, it’s often times hard to determine what quality is or what the standard should be.

Hiring contract security in many ways is assuring a base level of quality that you can’t assume you’re getting from sticking with an in-house department. Some contract security services even offer methods of quality control management to make sure you’re getting the best performance possible.

When you hire a contract security service, the whole company’s reputation is at stake with each working officer, and it’s mutually beneficial that they perform at the highest possible level.

Management

One of the other main advantages for using contract security in the Smithsonian’s report is the issue of management. It’s simply easier to hire or fire contract security guards than in-house guards.

If a contract guard isn’t acting according to yours or their standards of conduct, termination falls on the contractors, and you still get a viable replacement the next day.

Training

According to the study, 67 percent of museum respondents prefer a “well-trained
Hybrid Considerations

Of the museums in the study who used a hybrid security system (contract and proprietary) - a vast majority (63 percent) reported no problems managing the contract. But even among the challenges posed by managing contract security, many of the concerns had nothing to do with the performance or reliability of the contracted guards. Resentment toward contracted guards from proprietary guards, and a general worry of in-house jobs feeling jeopardized tended to be prevalent issues.

According to the study, a solution could be to do “rotation of posts, and to integrate the workforce so that contract and proprietary work together. In most institutions with hybrid guard forces, the proprietary force has supervisory authority over contract officers.”

Flexibility

A consideration for many museums is staffing up for special events or for busier times of year. This is one area where it’s imperative to use contract security, where adding personnel can often be done on relatively short notice.

Choosing Carefully

For any museum, finding a contract security company that shares similar values is
Every single interviewee using contract security in the study is satisfied with their contractor’s performance - but every single one of them had tried one or more contractors before settling on their current one.

So what’s the best way to vet contract security companies so you’re not wasting precious time and money?

**We’ve broken down the following items to consider:**

- **Affiliations** - Is this security company really interested in museums? Check to see if they (and their officers and managers) have professional museum affiliations or memberships.

- **References/History** - If they’re trying to win your business, but haven’t ever stepped foot in a museum, then that could be a factor to consider.

- **Accessibility** - Is the security company’s higher brass within reach? The ability to have discussions with a CEO about a security company’s core values is a better indicator than what they present in marketing materials. See what they say at the top regarding their role in protecting cultural properties.

**Institutional Loyalty and Core Values**

According to the study, two of the biggest concerns for many museums is that in-house guards tend to be more loyal and that they share the core values of the museum better than contracted guards. While core values are hard to quantify statistically, loyalty isn’t. Surveys revealed that 20 percent of museums’ proprietary security staffs parted ways annually, 10 percent of that coming from guards leaving for other organizations. It’s important to note that turnover problems aren’t unique to just in-house guards, but there’s a key difference: museums have to incur the replacement costs and training for new proprietary guards.

Furthermore, according to the study, of all the interviewees who used contract staff for the report, none of them found any issues with the loyalty of their contract security guards.

**CONCLUSION**

While there are reasons many museums continue to choose proprietary security officers, the benefits of contract security are still enough to warrant most organizations to change. Using proprietary guards alone greatly increases your chances of having unmanned posts, scrambling to fight turnover, and having inadequately trained officers.

Conclusions in this white paper were predominantly based on findings in a new comparative study produced by the Smithsonian Institution.