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By Michelle Bowles

A BREAK FROM THE NORM

Surveillance company treats new and existing customers to a poker night with Phil Hellmuth

Life may not be all fun and games, but it can't hurt to kick back and relax a bit every once in a while. The security industry is no different—a concept that surveillance company Digital Witness can stand behind.

Sunday night, Oct. 16, the company hosted a poker party for its existing and potential customers at Medici, a trendy, upscale restaurant and bar in the heart of Dallas. Attendees were treated to cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, a Texas Hold 'em

tournament complete with sizable cash prizes and a poker tutorial given by Phil Hellmuth, nine-time world champion Texas Hold 'em player—without a doubt, one of the highlights of the evening.

Hellmuth, an investor in Digital Witness, was in town for the weekend for a charity poker event that raised \$500,000 for the Children's Medical Center of Dallas and agreed to participate in Digital Witness' tournament, as well. To top that, he brought along a surprise of his own for attendees: fellow poker pro Clonie Gowan, who looked comfortable sitting down at the tables alongside attendees.

Incorporating poker into a client appreciation event was an easy decision for the company.

"Poker is a very hot thing right now," said Court Westcott, vice president of business development for Digital Witness.

This innovative event isn't what you find in the security industry every day, but that seems fitting, considering Digital Witness doesn't exactly fit the security industry mold.

It's a video surveillance company that opened its doors in August 2004 and operates as a subscription-based service. Clients sign up for monthly services to have their facilities monitored, instead of buying and installing their own equipment. The products—cameras, software, DVRs and monitors—are included in the service package, and Digital Witness provides installation, maintenance and training for as long as the contract is in effect.

With this subscription-based method, products don't become outdated and new clients see less risk involved, Westcott said. With more than 1,000 customers to date, the company focuses its efforts on helping clients better manage their businesses through surveillance.

"If our customers aren't making money off the system, we aren't doing our job," he said. "We see it time and time again—it's definitely changing the bottom line."

NOT YOUR AVERAGE CLIENT MEETING

These days, it seems it's not enough to provide customers with good products and decent service. They want the value-add. Today, more and more manufacturers are standing behind this notion.

Take Honeywell, for example, one of the biggest names in the security



industry. At ISC West in April, it hosted poker professionals Jennifer Harman and David Williams at its booth to play a few hands with customers during the show. A few months later at ASIS, Stanley Security—another notable name—invited professional race car driver Erin Crocker to its booth for a meet-and-greet with its customers. And most recently, Digital Witness' mid-October poker event followed the same trend.

More than 70 different bars and restaurants in the Dallas/

Fort Worth area—a major part of Digital Witness' business is focused on the restaurant industry—were represented at the event, which the company used as a means to give back to existing customers and introduce itself to potential new ones. Sales were made, Westcott said, and Digital Witness representatives were given the opportunity to speak with bar and restaurant owners and managers from across the area. Boiled down, the night was all about building relationships, he said.

"The next time we call a potential customer to give a demonstration, they'll be more responsive," he said. "We see this as a sales generator over the next couple of months."

The company also managed to incorporate some of its demos, which were setup throughout the restaurant, along with video testimonials from existing clients. During the past year, the company brought in a videographer to compile these testimonials from customers about how they use their systems and what returns on investment they are seeing.

THE VOTES ARE IN: IT'S A SUCCESS

The company managed to put the entire event together in just a week, Westcott said. And with clients given only a week's notice, the turnout was pretty incredible.

"The people that were interested in it, we got a great response from," he said. "We were really happy with how it turned out."

Clients were enjoying themselves so much, in fact, that most stayed for more than three hours.

While this year's event was a first for the company, Westcott sees it expanding into Digital Witness' other locations in Houston and Atlanta, or becoming a regular occurrence in Dallas.

"We'd love to do this again," he said. "I'd be surprised if we didn't." With successes like this, it may be time to ask, "What am I doing for my customers?" or "What's my provider doing for me?"

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FIND OUT MORE

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Phil Hellmuth; Rick Cashen, owner of Salou's Deli and Bar; and Clonie Gowan