

# Security at the Front Door – What the Receptionist needs to know!

October 1, 2021



*“Anybody here? Hello?”*

*You walk through the door of a small business and into the reception area. Surprise! There’s no one in sight! You stand there for a while, then call out: “Hello? Hello?”*

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## YOU HAVE JUST WITNESSED A BIG SECURITY BREACH –RIGHT AT THE FRONT DOOR!

Sure, there are many reasons these days why a small business might be short staffed — mostly, because of the pandemic, (Unemployment, no available child care, etc.). But an empty business encourages any would-be robber. And if the intruder has violence on the mind, whoever comes next into that reception area will be the prime target.

## WHERE’S THE RECEPTIONIST? AND WHAT’S THE ROLE OF THE RECEPTIONIST IN BUSINESS SECURITY?

As receptionist, you may consider yourself a customer service representative. That may actually be what's in your job description. But you are also the gatekeeper. In fact, you are the main element of security at the front door of the business! So this Advisory is for you!

Let's look at **some questions to ask** as you consider taking a job as receptionist. And if you're the employer, what you should be thinking about for that position. It's a key one!

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## 1-IS YOUR WORKPLACE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE?

Some jobs have a higher risk than others. For example, as receptionist, will you . . .

- Deal with cash? (ex. bank)
- Deliver or hold packages? (ex. hotel, mail stop)
- Encounter unstable people (ex. law enforcement, health care)?
- Work alone or with just a small group of co-workers?
- Work late at night?

Most office thefts take place in the early morning, lunch hours, and around closing time, particularly on Fridays or holidays. Does your reception area have just one person in it during those times? What happens when that person needs to go to the bathroom?

## 2-IS YOUR RECEPTION AREA LAID OUT IN THE BEST WAY POSSIBLE FOR SECURITY?

Generally, the receptionist should have a clear view of the entrance, and be able to see everyone in the lobby area.

Good visibility includes keeping doors and windows clear of signs, keeping the cash register in a central place where it can be seen from the outside, and keeping counter tops and displays low so no one can sneak in and hide. And, of course, visibility is improved with good lighting.

Does the receptionist deal with cash? If so, is there a **bolted down DROP safe** for added security? It lets envelopes be deposited without the safe door being unlocked. The safe makes deposits efficient — and keeps people from trying to fish the money back out!

In case you haven't seen one, here's an example of a drop safe, from Amazon (where we are affiliates). It costs around \$200. Amazon also offers installation for an additional price. Click on the image for full details and current price.



[Digital Depository Safe – Electronic Drop Box with Keypad, 2 Manual Override Keys – Deposit Cash Easily – For Home or Business by Paragon](#)

### **3-WHAT CONTROLS WHO COMES INTO THE LOBBY AND WHO GOES THROUGH INTO THE REST OF THE WORK AREA?**

Is there a desk or other barrier between the receptionist and visitors? Does the receptionist “buzz” people in from outside or do they just walk right in? Obviously, in a restaurant or shop, as in the picture above, doors are likely to be wide open. In an office, however, you'd expect some sort of formal reception area or lobby.

And given new pandemic health requirements, is the area set up so employees (or customers) can be easily screened before they enter?

### **4-WHAT RESPONSIBILITIES DOES THE RECEPTIONIST HAVE FOR SECURITY AT THE FRONT DOOR OR ELSEWHERE ON THE PREMISES?**

An “entry level” job may be what is being advertised, but as a receptionist you need to know answers to security questions like these:

- Does the receptionist keep track of who arrives and who leaves, and when? What about visitors? Do you use Visitor ID badges?

- What identification and ID policies are in place for regular visitors (vendors) and family members?
- Is there a list of people who are not allowed in? Who keeps the list, and does the receptionist know about it?
- Does the receptionist have a map of the property with rooms and escape routes marked, in order to assist First Responders who may arrive in an emergency?

Are temporary or substitute receptionists made aware of all these responsibilities for security?

## 5-DOES YOUR FRONT ENTRANCE HAVE VISIBLE SURVEILLANCE EQUIPMENT?

We've all seen them from time to time: wide-angle mirrors placed in strategic locations to eliminate blind areas.

And almost everywhere these days we are seeing both outdoor and indoor surveillance cameras meant to deter shady or criminal activity. A sign saying "You are being filmed!" helps, too. Some people even mount fake cameras — but experienced criminals can tell the difference. (After an incident has occurred, of course, cameras are only useful if they are real, and monitored.)

**Caution:** When it comes to signage, local regulations may limit — or force — what you can post. Be sure to do your research before you buy expensive equipment.

For this discussion, the question is: if cameras are installed, how are they monitored? From the front desk? From another location?

## 6-WHAT ABOUT PERIMETER SECURITY?

What follows are some simple technical solutions aimed at strengthening your business' perimeter. We haven't considered the role of security guards, or a security firm, in this discussion. That's a whole topic of its own!

**Fencing** serves as the classic perimeter security. That may include planter boxes and bollards (short, sturdy posts designed to keep out traffic). If physical fencing isn't possible, you may want to consider **virtual fencing**. New technology is coming into play all the time! Some virtual fencing to become familiar with:

- **“geo fencing”** uses GPS or RFID technology to create a virtual fence around a specific location. When a mobile device goes through the fence, it sends a message either to the device itself, or to a monitor.
- **laser fencing** where a “broken beam” indicates someone has come through the “fence” (We’ve all seen the movies where the thief has to maneuver athletically through miscellaneous red-colored laser beams!)
- **Wireless motion sensor** — also tracks heat — to let you know when anyone enters your property.

A couple of simple examples. The first is an example of a photoelectric beam (laser) motion detector with a relatively short range. It could be set up across a doorway or gate, for example.



[Seco-Larm E-931-S35RRQ Enforcer Indoor/Outdoor Wall Mounted Photoelectric Beam Sensor with 35 Foot Range](#)

This second example, also from Amazon, can secure a larger perimeter by adding additional components. (When you get to Amazon, click on the link to get to Guardline’s sales page to see all the different combinations.)



[Guardline Wireless Driveway Alarm – 1 Motion Detector Alarm Sensor & 1 Receiver, 500 Foot Range, Weatherproof Outdoor Security Alert System for Home & Property](#)

Once again, someone has to be monitoring the system in order to notice when the perimeter is breached! Is this the responsibility of the receptionist?

## 7-HAS A WINDOW OR DOOR BEEN OPENED?

A security system might also simply sound an alarm if **doors and/or windows** are unexpectedly broken or opened. This inexpensive system might work for a small business or shop.



[KERUI Upgraded Standalone Home Office Shop Security Alarm System Kit,Wireless Loud Indoor/Outdoor Weatherproof Siren Horn with Remote Control and Door Contact Sensor,Motion Sensor,Up to 115db Standalone Home Office Shop Security Alarm System Kit, Wireless Loud Indoor/Outdoor Weatherproof Siren Horn with Remote Control and Door Contact Sensor,Motion Sensor,Up to 110db](#)

## 8-DOES THE BUSINESS HAVE POLICIES FOR MANAGING A HOSTILE SITUATION?

We've experience too many incidents lately where employees or customers have "gone off," with tragic results. Could any of them be prevented?

- Has your receptionist received training on how to handle difficult people or threats?
- Does the receptionist have a "panic button?"
- Do you have a "code word" that would let someone know a dangerous situation has developed?
- How would you let all workers know there is an emergency situation at the front entrance?

## WHAT'S THE NEXT STEP FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

The questions in this Advisory are meant to start a discussion. If you're the potential (or current) receptionist, you'll find out a lot more about security at the front door – and your responsibility for it. If you're the business owner, you'll have a better idea of steps to consider for improving security.

Your business insurance carrier may be a good place to start for more information. Better security may reduce your insurance premium!

*“BUT OUR BUSINESS IS DIFFERENT.”*

Of course every business is different. That's why every business requires a customized plan for security. Consider getting help from a security consultant if you have questions. But don't put it off. **Every business has a legal duty and a moral obligation to provide a safe workplace.**

**Disclaimer:** We're not police or security professionals so the information here, while we believe it to be authoritative, is not guaranteed for accuracy and legality. Also, please be aware that laws and regulations vary from state to state and industry to industry. Get professional advice!

### **Virginia**

Your **Emergency Plan Guide** team

P.S. If security at the front door is something you're interested in, take a look at this Advisory, too: <https://emergencyplanguide.org/intruder/> It provides a more complete overview of different **monitoring equipment** and basic **monitoring systems** good for home or small business.

**P.S. Business owner or manager? Print out this article and use it to start a discussion with staff.** You may not need to follow through with all these suggestions. But you should at least have an idea of what other businesses are doing to protect their workplace — and their receptionist.