

Tactile Meets Tactical

Powered **alarm system** allows shoppers to play with – but not pocket — electronics

BY DAVID P. SCHULZ

Selling small consumer electronics is a new-product-driven business. Cell phones, MP3 players and PDAs sell best when consumers can pick them up, get acquainted with the hand-feel of the device and experience all the latest and greatest features themselves.

The challenge for the retailer is how to allow such hands-on inspection by shoppers while protecting the goods from being pocketed.

A solution that works for retailers such as Sears, Circuit City and Verizon Wireless is a security device called the G3 Powered-Alarm System. It allows consumers full access to a powered phone or other electronic device, allowing them to pick it up and scrutinize it. All the while, the item is tethered to the display, and an alarm will sound should someone sever the cord.

Manufactured by Tampa, Fla.-based Vanguard Products Group, the G3 Powered-Alarm System uses unique sensor heads designed to fit various devices from multiple manufacturers.

In addition, the G3 system includes a circuit board placed low on the fixture, which regulates the power voltage.

"It supplies the correct voltage, not too much, not too little," says Pat Rosato, national sales manager of Vanguard Products Group, adding that Vanguard Products consults with the manufacturers' engineers on the computing chip designs in each device. (Microsoft also is involved, he says, since it provides the mobile operating system for many of the products.)

Additional features include: LEDs to aid store associates with installation and identifying or correcting alarm conditions; a battery to back up the AC power supply; and keys that can be removed only when the system is in the armed position.

The G3 system is expandable via daisy-chain power alarm strips, and there is an option available that allows for arming and disarming the system from remote locations.

The genesis of the system dates back more than a year to when Verizon Wireless was receiving complaints that a store fixture used to display the Palm Treo smart phone

was causing the device to overheat.


As Vanguard was fabricating components designed specifically for the Treo, Verizon Wireless switched gears. "Rather than the Treo, which they said had about run its course as a hot product for them, they wanted to switch to the Motorola Q, which was a newer device," Rosato recalls.

Touchable vs. on display

Though Verizon Wireless executives declined to comment, "studies have shown that there is a 25 percent to 40 percent increase in sales when the device can be shown live," Rosato says. This is a preferred alternative to having the device in a static display, where a customer has to wait for a sales associate to bring out the product, power it up and demonstrate it.

Another view of the G3 Powered-Alarm System is provided by Kent Brown, vice president of western region sales for Irvine, Calif.-based fixture maker Frank Mayer. The company incorporates the devices into some retail clients' store point-of-purchase displays.

The G3 "is pretty unique," Brown says. "Most systems are either not powered or are in a stagnant environment." The security cord, which also supplies appropriately-regulated voltage to power the electronic device, "retracts into a spool that is out of sight, for all practical purposes. It's powered 24/7 and secured."

High performance and durability are major attributes of the G3 system, Brown says. "There is a premium price, but there is a long-time payback. We have yet to experience problems with it in the field, unlike other fasteners. There is nothing worse than putting a display in the field and then having to pull it back." 

David P. Schulz, a New York-based writer and editor, reports on U.S. and foreign retailers for several publications.

**Products shown
live in-store =
25% - 40%
increase in sales**

