



# White Paper: A False Sense of Security

**12** Factors for securing your facility  
beyond a reasonable doubt



By asking the right questions of your security vendors, you can cut through the noise, accurately understand the value of their offerings, and successfully counter contraband in your correctional facilities.

**“In spite of our diligent efforts, we are experiencing a vast increase in the amount of contraband being introduced into correctional facilities”**

## Inmates always seem to find a way

With nothing but time on their hands, they can watch and assess both corrections officers and security protocols, carefully observing the procedures and tools used to keep order.

And then they can formulate effective plans to get around them.

The result is that contraband is one of the most serious issues facing correctional facilities today. From drugs to weapons to cell phones, attempts to smuggle contraband into correctional facilities reached record levels in 2017: “In spite of our diligent efforts, we are experiencing a vast increase in the amount of contraband being introduced into correctional facilities statewide, which is exacerbated by current staffing shortages,” wrote Ricky Dixon, Florida’s deputy secretary of institutions this year.<sup>1</sup> Virtually every state is facing the same problems.

As a result, the pressure to make smart investments in security technology has never been greater.

But it can be very difficult to select the best tools and technologies to use in combatting contraband. Facilities must understand what their problems are and then recognize that many of them are coming from within, in ways that traditional detection technologies can miss. As a result, typical tools may not fully address the problem, and if the tried-and-true is falling short, what can work?

Thankfully, detection technologies have come a long way.

Facilities have more options available than ever, and it’s crucial to understand how to compare those options. No two products are exactly alike, even if they’re both used to fight contraband. Two items that appear very similar on the surface can be very different underneath.

That’s where this guide comes in.

Step-by-step, we’ll present the critical questions to ask when investigating and evaluating any new security solution, including six questions to ask of the product and six to ask about the vendor itself.

**Let’s get started.**

# Six Questions to Consider for the Security Product

## 1 Can it detect what you need it to?

Most contraband does not come in through the front door. It might be carried by bribed staff, snuck into mail parcels, pitched over the fence or walls, or dropped via drone. Often, the contraband originates inside the facility – starting life as a commissary good, kitchen material, or other item, only to be transformed into a weapon or other prohibited item. As a result, contraband can take many, many different forms. Not all detection equipment and technologies can work equally well in all areas of a prison, nor are they equally adept at catching the most important and dangerous forms of contraband. For example, metal wrapped in electrical tape can fool an archway metal detector, and tiny pieces of metal could elude technologies that detect based on mass rather than magnetics, whereas ferromagnetic detection technology – which detects the presence of ferrous metal components regardless of size or mass – would catch both.

So, when evaluating products that superficially seem similar, it's important to think through what you need detected. Then, look at what the security solution can genuinely detect and under what circumstances.

## Top three questions to ask when assessing security needs.

If you can answer the following three questions, it will go a long way toward determining which tool(s) you need most urgently.



**What am I trying to keep out of my facility?**  
Be specific.



**What are the ways it can get into my facility?**  
Be specific and thorough.



**What are the tools and techniques I have available to me to keep those things out of my facility?**

## 2 Is the technology versatile enough to be used everywhere it is needed?

In addition to detecting what you need to catch, ask if the equipment can work where you need it. Logistical considerations can inhibit or constrain the performance of many detection methods, and inmates and their co-conspirators eagerly take advantage of those security gaps.

Any contraband detection solution needs to be flexible and responsive to a variety of scenarios. Mobility is more important than ever in facilities where contraband is in constant motion. So too is the ability to scan environmentally – not just people but even seemingly empty areas and individual objects (e.g., scanning mattresses for embedded contraband).

## 3 Does the technology enable stealthy security options?

Inmates have proven that they can plan around stationary, predictable, and identifiable detection mechanisms. Any assessment of a security technology must consider if the product can successfully get around the ingenuity of the inmate and the growing sophistication of how they bypass existing rules and procedures. In this regard, it can be immensely valuable to deploy detection methods that (a) are invisible to inmates and (b) can be deployed anywhere, at any time, so their use becomes unpredictable.

In short, does the detection methodology offer its users the element of surprise that is often critical to detection success among today's savvy prison populations?



#### 4 Is the technology future-proofed to help deal with emerging threats?

Today's security investment will need to pay off for a significant amount of time, during which new threats will emerge and old threats will evolve. Will the investment be able to keep up?

**Consider drones:** Drones can deliver contraband to prison yards from 20 miles away, can pose huge security risks, and preventing them is non-trivial. Jamming technology is available but can interfere with aircraft and other communication systems, making it difficult to get permission from government agencies to deploy. Michael Zeigler, deputy secretary of Public Safety and Corrections in Maryland, puts it plainly: "Our biggest concern is flying weapons in. You get a gun inside a facility, that's a nightmare."<sup>2</sup>

So, you must interrogate whether the technology meets or exceeds the sophistication not just of today's threats, but also of tomorrow's.

#### 5 Can the technology detect contraband "behind the wall?"

Obviously, it is crucial to find detection equipment that can effectively monitor entry and exit points. But what happens if the contraband originates inside the facility (e.g., a piece of metal fashioned into a shank), or if it successfully bypasses exit/entry detection equipment?

This is particularly important when some forms of contraband, like cell phones, are becoming ubiquitous thanks to "assistance" from corrections officers. In 2016, the FBI arrested literally dozens of corrections officers in Georgia alone on corruption charges for allegedly smuggling cell phones to inmates.<sup>3</sup> Perimeter detection equipment is generally useless in this situation.

In this security environment, you must assess any new detection technology for its ability to work inside the facility.



#### 6 Does the technology offer a positive return on investment?

While cost is obviously a critical consideration, don't let price be your sole guide. Value can come in many different forms.

- **Effectiveness.** A costlier but highly effective piece of detection equipment will justify its expense; a cheaper form that allows contraband to sneak by will not. Buy right the first time.
- **Value generation.** Sometimes equipment can offer non-obvious ways to generate value. For example, one state Department of Corrections derived over half a million dollars in new revenue over an 18-month period from increased phone revenues, after magnetic detection increased confiscation of contraband cell phones.
- **Force multiplication.** Another key aspect of ROI: can the technology serve as a force multiplier? Many states are facing a dire shortage of corrections officers and other staff in correctional facilities. Alabama, for example, is staffing at only 61% of prescribed strength.<sup>4</sup> That can leave hundreds of positions unfilled. If the technology can do more work with fewer staff, it is worth its weight in gold.

“The vendor is not selling a product;  
they’re selling an outcome.”

## Six Questions to Consider for the Security **Vendor**

### **1 Do they possess significant expertise and experience within corrections?**

Many vendors develop security solutions either (a) for a specific sector and then try to shoehorn the solution into other market segments or (b) without regard for, or in-depth understanding of, any particular market. Yet corrections, like all industries, faces unique trends, issues, and challenges. For example, correctional facilities often demand a certain degree of versatility and ruggedization of security equipment not required, for example, at an office building or in aviation.

Nothing replaces industry experience and a direct, first-hand understanding of your needs and how to help solve your problems. Ideally, the product itself will have been built specifically for corrections, and the security vendor will have hired corrections people directly. Ask the vendor about the people on staff to verify that they have dealt with, and have experience in, corrections.

### **2 Is their sales process consultative, informative, and educational?**

Here’s a key differentiator between vendors that often gets overlooked: how much effort do they spend to understand your specific situation?

Most vendors will sing the praises of their products to the high heavens ... and then stop there. Just as the ideal vendor will possess corrections sector experience, they should put that expertise into practice by helping you to understand how the product will fit into your individual facility.

When the vendor comes in, they should consult on:

- How you’ll use it;
- Where it will be deployed; and
- The ways in which it will fit into a larger security and anti-contraband strategy.

### **3 Do they provide the training needed to be successful?**

Detailed and rigorous training, by industry experts, makes all the difference in moving equipment from a great idea to a great asset. Such training goes far beyond explaining where the on/off switch is. In-depth training:

- Allows facility staff to understand how to deploy the equipment for successful outcomes;
- Motivates staff to actually use the equipment; and
- Helps users to understand not just the functionality but the underlying value.

Trainers should get behind the walls with staff in real-world scenarios, demonstrating where and when to use screening technology – up to and including actually screening inmates in front of facility staff.

Further, remember that training in corrections is not a one-and-done deal. Annual turnover among corrections officers is a modern-day crisis, and the people who get trained immediately after the purchase may not be the people using the equipment in 6 or 12 months. In Mississippi, turnover is an astounding 47%, which is unusually bad but not far off from other states. The vendor should offer ongoing training and support options that can help compensate for these issues rather than aggravating them.

#### 4 Will they be there to support you after the sale?

Post-sales support should not be an afterthought. All too often, vendors in this space effectively disappear after the sale has been made. That's absurd: the relationship between a facility and the security vendor does not end at the point of sale; that's when it begins.

Look for a vendor that will commit to an ongoing, hands-on approach to account management, maintenance and repairs, trouble-shooting, and customer support. Even if the product is straightforward and simple to use, a positive ongoing relationship with the vendor ensures the investment can continue to pay dividends into the future.

Ultimately, post-sale support is about recognizing that the vendor is not selling a product; they're selling an outcome, and the vendor needs to provide whatever level of support is required to successfully and reliably produce that outcome.

#### 5 Can they support you throughout the budgeting, buying, and procurement process?

Evaluating a security solution is just the first step. Budgeting and making a purchase decision is an equally important and arduous step. The vendor should be able to help facilitate this process. For example, they can help get all the different stakeholders – from management to end-users – involved and should know how to discuss their solution in a way that speaks to each stakeholder's individual concerns.

It's the same for procurement. Can the vendor support you through this often-lengthy process? For instance, the vendor might be able to help provide or generate an objective evaluation that does some of the work for the procurement person, facilitating their work. In other words, will your vendor work with you to organize data and information to submit objective comparisons that enable procurement officers to accurately understand the investment and its value?

#### 6 Do you have other questions?

The questions discussed in this paper can help you and your facility to make smarter, more effective, and higher value decisions when selecting contraband detection solutions. (For a handy checklist of the considerations we've discussed, see the next page.)

Ultimately, well-chosen vendors and equipment can help your organization do more than successfully fight contraband; they can bolster your ability to face emerging threats, deal with staff turnover, and address new questions and challenges.

But the questions listed here may not cover every circumstance, and your facility may have unique concerns. If you have further questions about how to evaluate potential security options, please contact us – we will be happy to work through those questions with you.





# Checklist: Comparing Products and Vendors

<b>Can it detect what you need it to?</b>	✓
Can the vendor show you performance, not against what's easy to find, but against the most challenging items?	
Can the technology detect contraband with very little mass, like razor blades, drill bits, or hypodermic needles?	
<b>Is the technology versatile enough to be used anywhere it is needed?</b>	✓
Does the equipment screen everywhere you want to use it?	
Does it require more operational space than you have or are willing to allocate to it?	
Can it lay flat and screen, for example, mattresses?	
Can you take it outside, in the heat, rain, snow and sleet?	
Can it be used to screen visitors, staff, and inmates alike?	
<b>Does the technology enable stealthy security options?</b>	✓
Can it be used out of prisoners' sight?	
Can it be used in unexpected situations or places?	
Can it be moved easily?	
<b>Can the technology help deal with emerging and inside threats?</b>	✓
Can the security technology work against such emerging threats like contraband smuggled via drones?	
Can the security technology provide detection and protection when the call is coming from "inside the house"?	
<b>Does the technology offer positive ROI?</b>	✓
Can the security technology help to deal with, or compensate for, staffing shortages?	
Does the technology or solution offer a positive financial return on investment?	
Does the technology or solution product produce any other forms of value (non-financial)?	
Can you clearly articulate the totality of what you get back for deploying the product?	
<b>Does the vendor possess significant expertise and experience within the corrections market?</b>	✓
Do they attend trade shows?	
Do they support industry causes?	
Can you get a list of customers and references? How many references can they provide?	
Do vendor staff members have experience working in corrections?	
<b>Do they provide the training and consultative input needed to be successful?</b>	✓
Do they offer training beyond just "here's how you turn it on/off"?	
Will their trainers demonstrate and educate where and how to use it to detect the things you want to find?	
Can they provide or offer deployment strategies?	
Can they assist with the budgeting and procurement process?	
<b>Will they be there to support you after the sale?</b>	✓
Will they continue to engage with you after the sale is complete?	
Will they be proactive, or do they require you to initiate all contact?	
Can they provide objective evaluation information for procurement?	

## About Metrasens

Metrasens is the world's leading provider of advanced magnetic detection technologies. With a technology center and manufacturing facility in the UK, a North American sales and customer service hub in Chicago and a global network of distributors, the company's innovative products are designed to address deficiencies in conventional screening methods and make the world safer and more secure. Metrasens' mission is to take cutting-edge science from the laboratory and use it to create revolutionary, award-winning products that meet the distinct and diverse security needs of its customers. Metrasens' core technologies have a wide range of real-world applications, embodied by solutions that are easy to adopt and simple to use.

For more information, visit us at [www.metrasens.com](http://www.metrasens.com).

### References

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