

CE quality marking

Why it matters for the security industry

Security installers who ignore CE testing and certification may soon have cause for concern, warns John Downie of CBC (Europe) Ltd

What happens when a product that you install causes damage, loss or injury due to a technical fault? For example, if a camera starts a fire some time after it was installed because of a failure in its internal wiring? Or if a poorly earthed DVR happens to give someone an electric shock one day? Or if an ageing power supply unit begins to interfere with other important equipment as a result of excessive electro-magnetic emissions?

In the rush to win and complete contracts it's easy to overlook the fact that the security installer who supplies and fits any product is directly responsible for ensuring that it is both fit for purpose, and safe. That responsibility does not end when the invoice is paid, or even when another company takes over the maintenance contract: years down the line your company may be called to account in court for a faulty piece of equipment that it sold and fitted, if that equipment did not comply with mandatory standards.

Responsibility for loss or damage

This single fact alone - this ongoing liability - is the most important reason why every installer of electrical equipment should understand the significance of the CE safety marking. Put simply, if you make sure that the products you use are CE tested and certified, then you will be immune from litigation. The responsibility for any loss or damage due to equipment failure will then be on someone else's shoulders, not yours

The CE testing-and-certification rules have been in place throughout Europe for almost 10 years now, and have been a great success in raising product safety and performance standards. The rules cover a wide range of products sold in the European Economic Area, including CCTV products and all electronic equipment.

But, worryingly, people are starting to take these standards for granted. We all assume that, with modern manufacturing techniques, all electronic equipment can be relied on to

perform safely and well for the full product lifetime. But this is a dangerous assumption.

Shopping around - but for what?

It's true that electronic equipment production processes are becoming ever-more efficient, so if we shop around we can pick up function-rich products much more cheaply than in the past. But buyer beware: safe manufacturing still depends on old fashioned testing and quality checking and it's no accident that it costs around £5000 per product, at the development stage alone, to achieve CE certification. This is not money spent on filling out forms and ticking boxes; most if it goes on testing electronics for real problems and modifying designs to eradicate them.

So it's important for all security installers to understand what CE marking means.

What does CE marking mean?

The CE Mark consists of the letters "CE" - an abbreviation for 'Conformité Européenne'. It applies to products regulated by a number of health, safety and environmental protection laws and it is obligatory for products that it applies to. In order to be allowed to sell products in the European market the manufacturer must get the product tested, approved and must affix the CE mark to it as proof of this.

For electronic security products, the tests cover electromagnetic (EM) emissions and the safety of low voltage products.

Electromagnetic emissions, if excessive, will cause interference on other electronic equipment. To conform to the CE standard, the products must not give-off excessive EM and they must also have a level of immunity to EM from other equipment.

The main purpose of the Low Voltage Directives is to ensure health and safety and to prevent unsafe products coming onto the market, or being put into service.

As an installer, this is useful background information, but all you really need to do is take due care in checking that the products you buy are CE certified. Usually it is enough to see the CE marking on the product, but if you are in any doubt (perhaps buying from an overseas supplier that you have little prior knowledge of, or have not heard of) ask for a copy of the certificate. This will show you where the product was tested and what it was tested for; but make sure that the specific product is named on the certificate as 'coverall' company certificates mean nothing.

Why CE matters now

Why should security suppliers take an interest in this now? Because it is becoming increasingly easy to buy cheap

products from overseas companies selling through catalogues and websites. These companies may not be intentionally selling non-compliant goods and they may be unaware that they are breaking the law by selling such products into European markets simply because they are not putting their equipment through the CE safety testing process. But the fact remains that if the law is broken, through ignorance or deliberately, it is the installer who will be held responsible.

In the last half year we have seen a growing number of cameras, DVRs and a whole range of electronic security equipment offered for sale, apparently without CE certification. Our concern is that security systems installers, tempted to try these products, are leaving themselves open to litigation in the event of any failure, or even just alleged failure, at any point in the future.

Good reputation - vital for our businesses

CBC, as the manufacturer of Computar and Ganz products, understands the pressure on installers to keep their costs down. Like most of the larger, longer-established manufacturers we don't want to be regarded simply as 'the big boys' trying to keep out cut-price competition. Nothing could be further from the truth because, as product developers, we know that competition is the life-blood of our industry, encouraging market growth and customer interest as well as technical improvement and innovation. But it's the way we go about product development, as an industry, that matters. We must recognise that the safety and performance standards now taken for granted in Europe do not always apply in other parts of the world and understand that products made for sale in some other markets may do damage here.

As an industry, we should not put at risk our good reputation. Customers will soon catch-on if security companies start installing illegal, non-CE marked products.

Our message as responsible manufacturers is that product standards should not be allowed to slide backwards because some buyers don't fully appreciate the importance of CE marking. It is up to us all, manufacturers, installers, inspectorates and trade bodies, to remind customers why CE marking matters!

