

Q&A Stephen Cooper OBE, COO Apstec Systems

November 2020 by [Marc Jacob](#)

High footfall security screening technologies such as Apstec's Human Security Radar are reaching maturity just in time to play a major role in securing crowded places in the post pandemic era.

COO of Apstec Systems, Stephen Cooper OBE, talks about the nature of high footfall security screening technology and the irresistible logic behind its widespread deployment in response to the experiences and lessons identified following the disastrous Covid-19 pandemic.

Q. When you refer to high footfall screening, what exactly are you talking about and why is it particularly relevant today?

A. I'm talking about security screening systems that can screen thousands of people an hour, automatically and in real time, whilst allowing them to flow freely through the system without disruption. Their main application is the protection of crowded places such as entertainment and sports venues, exhibition centers and transport networks; essentially, anywhere there's a crowd that may be vulnerable to terrorist attack.

Q. The shortcomings of traditional aviation style security when used in crowded places scenarios have been clear for a long time. How did we end up in this situation?

A. The adoption of aviation style security for the protection of crowded places was a natural response to the indiscriminate mass casualty focused international terrorist attacks in the early 2000s. It was inevitable that people looked to use what they were familiar with and following the 9/11 attacks aviation security was high on everyone's agenda. People knew that aviation security was ill suited to protecting crowded places but there were few options. Over time, its shortcomings became accepted and this type of security was adopted as the standard approach to securing crowded places.

Q. What do you consider the shortcomings of traditional security approaches to be and how will high footfall screening changes things?

A. The four biggest problems with using aviation style security are: the secondary queues, which are vulnerable to attack; the whole life costs of traditional security, which are mainly driven by high staffing levels; the poor customer experience; and the loss of commercial opportunities resulting from people being stuck in queues and not in venues. Conversely, all of these weaknesses are actually the strengths of high footfall screening, which was designed with the operational requirement for securing crowded places in mind. Queues are largely done away with, staff levels are low, so considerable savings in whole life costs can be made, the experience is vastly improved and as people spend more time in the venues commercial opportunities grow.

Q. High footfall security screening systems have been around for a few years now, are they starting to get traction in the market?

A. From an Apstec perspective, we've sold Human Security Radar into a wide range of market segments and see tremendous interest in what we're offering across the board. We've supported a number of high-profile events including The Geneva International Motor Show and the G20 Summit in Osaka, which demonstrates that we're getting the right people's attention. We're also engaged in several international development programmes, which similarly illustrates the confidence that governments have in the technology. However, I think that it is fair to say that the security industry is quite conservative when it comes to adopting new technology and sometimes it may be easier to do

nothing. Of course, doing nothing may not be an option in the face of the Covid-19 and possible future pandemics.

Q. How will the current pandemic impact security screening in the future?

A. Our experience of Covid-19 and the risk of similar pandemics in the future, will doubtless accelerate the transition from traditional security to high footfall screening. According to research by the University of Nottingham and the Finnish Institute of Health, security checkpoints, just like those we're using to secure crowded places at present, are the highest risk points in transport networks when it comes to transmitting infectious diseases. It is unequivocal that high footfall security offers a much lower health risk solution; free flow, low contact and low density, it is everything that standard security is not. I see widespread interest in moving away from current approaches.

Q. There will be some who believe that life will return to normal once a vaccine is in place and infections come under control. What would you say to these people?

A. I think that there's some wishful thinking going on. The vaccine is no panacea. There will be more variants of existing viruses, new viruses and new pandemics; the conditions are set. It is also worth bearing in mind that the highest risk on the UK national risk register in 2020 was a Flu pandemic, not a SARS (Covid-19) pandemic; Flu is still out there. Irrespective of an effective vaccine, lessons will be learned and health risk reduction will remain a big driver for change. Specifically, if there's a requirement to satisfy the authorities that businesses can open and operate safely in the face of a pandemic then the status quo is very unlikely to do that.

Q. Security is generally seen as an unwelcome but necessary overhead. From what you say, there seems to be an opportunity here to grab the attention of the Boardroom as well as security professionals. Is that your expectation?

A. Yes. Whilst the headline driver for change may be Coronavirus and the risks of future pandemics, there's been a strong rationale to transform from the traditional security screening approach to high footfalls screening for some years. Mitigating security risks by removing large queues, improving the security experience, reducing costs and improving commercial opportunities all add up to a pretty compelling case for change. Add to this the way in which high footfall screening helps reduce the health risks and sets the conditions for businesses to remain in operation safely during a future pandemic, and it is apparent to me that this is a strategic issue. Progressive security professionals will be keen to move things forward but this is about much more than security. At last security can contribute something to the bottom line and Chief Executives need to sit up and take note.

Stephen Cooper OBE will be speaking on Day Three of International Security Week, sponsored by Apstec, in a session on Security Screening in the Post Pandemic Era.

To find out more about International Security Week and to register to join for free, from 30 November – 3 December, please visit: <https://www.internationalsecurityexpo.com/register-for-international-security-week>

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