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MARKET TRENDS: ACCESS CONTROL

New issues spur visitor management growth**Growing need to address security, liability puts visitor systems front and center as part of access control option**

By Joanne Friedrich, contributor

Cited as a necessary element to address both security and liability risks within organizations, visitor management systems have moved to the top of the list as a part of an access control system.



"The deals are getting larger, the sales cycle is getting shorter," explained Howard Marson, chief executive officer for EasyLobby.

"People want to deploy (visitor management) quickly and across all locations," he added.

The old paper log systems for checking visitors in and out of buildings has long been problematic, Marson said, ranging from issues with illegible handwriting to incomplete information.



DSI's turnstiles are incorporating new technology, such as bar code readers for visitor management.

New rules governing liability within corporations, such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, requires public companies to keep track of who is visiting executives, Marson said. "And paper and pen just doesn't cut it."

New systems, many of which log in visitors and verify their identity, also protect the privacy of the visitors, Marson said, unlike log sheets that can be viewed by anyone signing in.

Rafael Moshe, founder of Edgelinx, which recently sold its LobbyWorks business to Honeywell, said the focus on visitor management comes from a need to know "not only what happens with employees, but those you know less about."

He said industries, such as health care and pharmaceuticals, are required under industry standards to keep track of people and events at their facilities.

Pointing to the security issue, Bill Wayman, director of security services for TVA Fire and Life Safety, said the new generation

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of visitor management systems can prevent situations such as the one that happened in Oklahoma City, where Timothy McVeigh was able to "case" the building he bombed by gaining wide access to it.

"The new systems and increased use of visitor management helps deter that kind of activity," he said. The bottom line, Wayman said, is to know who is in the building, why they are there and where they are allowed to go.

In the event of an emergency, Marson said, systems can provide data that would be useful for evacuation purposes.

Much as employers track employees through access systems, visitor management can provide similar controls.

"More and more companies are taking a closer look at security for visitors," said Joe Wright, director of marketing for Fargo Electronics. This includes both the short-term visitor, who is attending a hour-long meeting, he said, as well as the repeat visitors, such as contractors doing building work.

At its most simple application, Wright said, companies are replacing logs with an entry-level visitor badging system, using printed, stick-on badges with basic personal information. From there, he said, the level of sophistication rises to systems that make use of plastic badges, validate identification through a driver's license or passport, and control access through a mag stripe or other device.

Another method for handling visitor management is to have a separate reader than the one used by employees.

Curtis Lamson, director of sales for Designed Security Inc., said a new turnstile system uses bar code readers to read a card-size piece of paper with a UPC code that is issued to visitors. The bar code tag, which expires at a set time, can be thrown away.

"What we're seeing is people want automated, cost-effective systems," he said. On-line registration is one way to cut down on the time spent at the security desk, he said.

With limited time to train employees, Honeywell's Moshe said customers want visitor management systems that register people quickly.

"It's a business function needed to fulfill a requirement," he said. That's why Moshe said he approached visitor management not only as a security product, but as a "front-office solution."

"We look at it from a process perspective," he said, using interfaces with the Internet for pre-registration and with Outlook or Lotus Notes for notification "to facilitate the connection between the visitor and the sponsor."

With a growing interest in visitor management, participants say they are seeing the industry as a whole become more focused on making its integration as easy as possible.

"The access control management companies are getting on board now," said Lamson of DSI. "We're seeing software companies rewriting packages to include visitor management."

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