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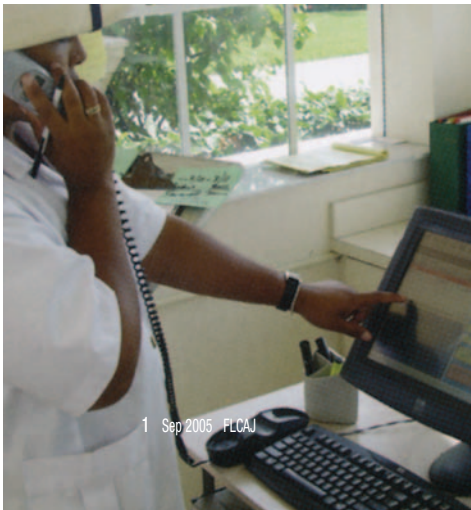
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Choosing the Right Access Control System

by Bethany A. Giles

The bar code sticker attached to residents' cars is a popular means of gaining access control, according to Ryan Bean, sales engineer with TEM Systems in Sunrise, FL. However, its popularity does not mean it's for all communities.

While many communities want access control that's showy and high-tech, they need to keep in mind that access control is not always synonymous with security. While some do want a very exclusive means of entry that can be rather inconvenient or costly to the community, others find that lighter control with greater convenience for the residents is preferred.

Bean suggests that there are three ways of looking at access, from a security standpoint, a convenience standpoint, and a price point.

Security

For strict restriction of entry, gates should be manned, bar code stickers should be applied to residents' cars, and there should be video surveillance. Regular visitors, such as family, caregivers, delivery personnel, or maintenance workers can find this irritating. But with this means there is a record—either electronic from the bar codes or by hand with the guard—of every car that enters the property. A database of all regular visitors, relatives, and

residents helps the community know who is among them. Video archives can settle disputes and monitor visitors' traffic patterns.

Convenience

For convenience, there really is nothing easier than a remote control in each car that regularly enters your community. It works effortlessly in poor weather, at all hours, and it works for whoever has been entrusted with the device. Simply press a button, and the gate or arm lifts. No guard is required. But, no record of visitors is available, either. There is no database, and remotes are not coded for any specific residence. One reason this means of access was so popular for a while is because it was easy for a developer to give a degree of security with the ease of mass distribution, Bean suggests.

Price Point

For lower budgets, the swipe card or push-button code is common.

They can be made unique to each residence, and therefore can give a record of some entries. Convenience, however, is low since the driver must lower a window and manually do something to gain access. Security is low as well, since cards can be shared and codes can spread "like a virus," Bean says.

When shopping for access control, keep in mind that discovering someone else's great system and saying "I want that" is like shopping for a car, suggests Bean. It can be tough to actually get "that" if you don't know the cost of "that." And maybe, it's just not what will serve your needs.

"You'll see a lot of neat (security and access control) toys in magazines, but it's better to have a system designed uniquely for you that accounts for your specific needs," Bean says. "What you want and what you can have—or need—may be different things."

Bean lists several questions to ask your community when beginning your research into various access control types:

- How do you want it maintained (by association, manager, vendor, or etc.)?
- How expandable is the system? It should last (with occasional minor upgrades and repairs) about 10–15 years.
- Do you want to cut down on tailgating?
- How do you want the gates and/or arms to work?
- How do you want to allow visitor access versus resident access?
- Want an e-pass on the window of each car (more costly)?
- Will residents balk at a card you physically swipe in a machine (less costly)?
- What kinds of service agreements are available after the installation?
- How long is the warranty that's offered?
- What kind of regular maintenance agreement is available?
- Is there concern about your perimeters—or just the main entries?
- Do you want to video all traffic for legal and safety reasons?
- Consider the amount of use your system will have: how much traffic flow do you have in a day? How many times will a gate have to open and shut in a day?
- Consider the computer parts of any higher-end systems. Will the parts be of such quality to hold up over time?
- Do you need "tiger teeth" installed to reduce wrong-way entries?
- Are battery backups provided so the gates will work during power outages when rescue vehicles need access?
- What kinds of association codes exist in relation to safety? Do your ideas meet ADA regulations mandated by your city or state with regard to the size of your entry lanes, pedestrian access, or emergency entry for fire or rescue vehicles?

Concerning pedestrian access, Bean offers that many times when gates go up, so do fences—mainly so people don't drive around the gates. "So most wind up with either unlimited pedestrian access (without gates), or non-existent access, which is not in line with the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements. If someone wants in bad enough, they will find a way ... but can friendly pedestrians access too?"

One of the most adamant tips Bean offers is to invest in something that may not seem like an integral part of access control: CCTV, or closed circuit television. "Secure your investment by putting cameras on gates and in other areas to record digitally

any person who comes in or out. Then you have no more 'he said/she said' issues at the gate," and the cameras ensure liability when accidents, flared tempers, or break-ins occur.

"There are hundreds of cameras in places like Wal-Mart and Target—it's how they protect their investment. We put cameras in doors, at stop lights, and in gates," Bean says.

He adds that communities should not be fooled by appearances, either. "A system can look great, but performance is better. Yes, there are some neat toys, but how they are used and where, is the key," Bean asserts. ■

One Community's Answer to Access Control

by Bethany A. Giles

Knowledge indeed is power when life experience leads to big savings on community association projects. One example is at Jacksonville Golf and Country Club when they switched from a broad, anonymous means of gate access to one that is much more exclusive and secure.

According to Access Control committee member Hugh van der Does, preparations for the switch began long before either he or his co-planner came onto the Access Control committee—and long before anyone decided how to make the switch.

How did life experience help? With a security expert and a computer wiz working together, the community cut out a middleman vendor for the project, van der Does says.

"The committee was already established," adds van der Does, stating that his committee is similar to landscaping, interior design, or any other committee that deals with upkeep of the physical plant.

The reserve for the project was ready to go, too, thanks to money set aside years before. But what would they choose for an upgrade?

Previously, the community used what van der Does refers to as a "clicker," a remote that would open the gate and allow entry. The trouble was, van der Does admits, that several remotes had been loaned out to non-community members. "We are a large community, with 919 homes; over the years, if you consider two to three cars per household at least... well, there were a lot of clickers utilized inappropriately."

Whether remotes were given to boyfriends, grandmothers, baby sitters, or meal delivery services, there were just too many of them out there. Additionally, the system only logged the number of entries—not any details about who entered.

"It took years to decide what to do, but what we did was done under my watch," says van der Does.

A lot of research went into the project, van der Does says, including visiting and speaking with other gated communities in the Jacksonville area to see what they had done. "We were among the last to go to the bar code."

"We asked others what they used, which vendors they used, what they would do differently if they were to do it over again, how much they paid ... then we investigated all the various vendors and elected not to use a vendor," van der Does says.

Instead of a vendor providing a turn-key operation complete with computers, hardware, software, and other components, van der Does's committee went to TEM Systems for the software, to Dell for the computers, and to BellSouth for the DSL. As their own middlemen, they acquired a very state-of-the-art system and paid a lot less money, he says, "which is great for an equity club." There was no special assessment since the association set aside a reserve a few years ago just for this project.

"We came in 20 percent under budget the way we did it," van der Does says.

Van der Does handled the security concerns of the project, but they really needed about 30 people to help during the testing and implementation phase. "In our quarterly newsletter we asked for volunteers for the test period before we threw the switch and for affixing of stickers to the cars. We had 25 to 30 volunteers who worked every day in September for three hours at different parts of the day."

They organized the affixation of bar code stickers at one of the community's two gates. A schedule was printed up so residents could come through the gates and get their bar code stickers. "It took a lot of time and effort, but it turned out very well."

"During the month of September, the clickers were still on, but in October we turned the clickers off and had full use of the new system," he adds.

Van der Does says he would advise other communities who want to cut out the middle man to "Be prepared to find volunteers to put in the effort and research—if you're not prepared to seek them out, then don't try it."

Research also is critical, he offers, because the association needs to know what they are looking for before they actually go shopping for a new system. This ensures that the project fulfills all the community's requirements and needs. But that rule of thumb applies even if a community does use a middleman or contractor to plan the project.

Van der Does says the project took about six months from the beginning of his research until the completion date. It utilized two people for the research, negotiations, buying, and set up. About 30 were utilized for three-hour shifts daily for the better part of a week to install the stickers on the cars.