

The 'Key' Fits on the Cloud

Some apartment communities are reaching skyward for alternative solutions to traditional lock-and-key security systems.



That pie-in-the-sky key control solution? It's now a reality. Like everything else, security and key control is skewing toward the cloud. Many multifamily security systems now feature a cloud-based platform that provides remote credential management of common areas and resident doors for multiple buildings—an ideal solution for owners or managers who can't be in five places at once.

Security in the cloud can minimize property management risk, increase return on investment through more convenient controlled access to additional revenue areas—such as laundry or vending machines—and can provide greater operational efficiency for property owners and managers.

Although many owners and management companies have not yet made the transition, apartment professionals such as Mitch Harrison, CEO of Atlanta-based First Communities Management, say they are considering making the switch.

“There is a natural progression to move toward that operating platform,” he says. “Operating in a cloud environment will bring about a level of efficiency and accountability that is hard to ignore.”

Improved efficiency with electronic access control is evident, as owners and managers will no longer need to re-key a lock whenever a resident moves or a key is lost or stolen. They can remotely add, edit or delete user credentials from their computers via the cloud. By eliminating mechanical keys, property owners can reduce key costs, including cutting keys, tracking keys, replacing locks, rekeying locks and managing keys in the traditional manner.

With a mouse click, administrators can also set schedules, such as limiting the times when landscape maintenance workers may enter the grounds—only from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m., for example. Temporary credentials can also be provided with time schedules for painters and other interim workers. Administrators can retrieve audit trail reporting to determine who was where and when. They can also set access schedules for all common areas and facility amenities. For instance, the pool can remain locked from 10 p.m. until 8 a.m.

The Key to Keyless

Although most apartment communities still use mechanical locks and keys, card-based access controls are becoming more popular.

One of the most state-of-the-art options is the smart card—a “one-key” solution for security.

Smart cards offer several different layers of security, including mutual authentication, which enables the reader and the card to talk with each other before any information is exchanged.

They also provide AES 128 bit-encryption, a state-of-the-art key coding technique to protect sensitive information on the card. They utilize diversified keys, which secures a unique identity for each card. A message authentication code (MAC) further protects each transaction between the credential and the



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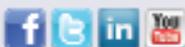
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—Mitch Harrison, CEO
First Communities Management

reader, guaranteeing complete and unmodified transfer of information, helping to protect data integrity and prevent outside attacks.

Smart credentials enable a community to consolidate many services on one card, including building access reporting and controls, identification, amenity access control, guest access and reduced key-duplication risks. By consolidating to a one-card solution, management companies can streamline productivity by incorporating a multitude of applications on a smart card.

For those making the transition from proximity-only readers to smart credentials—and future reader credential platforms—multi-technology readers work with both types of frequency. With multi-technology readers, residents can still use their current proximity credentials until the community has migrated to smart credentials.

Harrison says his company has used “just about every type of electronic security system available” depending on their clients’ needs and desires. He says the vast majority of the properties utilize a card reader or fob system for all amenity areas and gates—and well as camera systems to monitor such areas.

“One of the more intriguing recent developments in terms of security is the availability of wireless intrusion alarms and wireless camera systems,” he says. “The affordability and ease of installation of such systems is allowing us to be more aggressive in promoting these systems as an amenity and using camera systems outside of our traditional amenity areas in helping patrol our communities.”

When making any type of security or key-control decision, Harrison says it’s important to consider each property’s demographic.

“A younger or more tech-savvy demographic very well might prefer these types of new technologies, while there are still those who equate a sense of home and security with your traditional lock and key,” he says. “It is important to keep your hand on the pulse of new and exciting technologies without losing sight of property-specific needs.”

FYI Thank you to Ingersoll Rand and Protection1 for contributing to this article. For a full list of NAA National Suppliers Council (NSC) members who provide security and key control services, please see pages 91 and 92.