

The Value of Smart Security

Before COVID-19 smartphone apps were already a market trend, but now they're all the rage

By Wanchai Siriwalothakul

Society has come to value the mobility and convenience of smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices. The reasons are many, but according to mobilecoach.com, nine out of 10, or 94 percent of the population in the United States carry a cell phone. It is only natural that mobile apps be employed for facility security at motorized/hydraulic gates and electronically-controlled entrances in multi-tenant properties.

With this in mind, the advent of the COVID-19 has resulted in a growing demand for contactless access control, which in turn has resulted in the proliferation of mobile credentials for smartphones. A secondary benefit is video conferencing, allowing people in multiple-tenant settings to see their visitor at an electronically-controlled gate or the entrance of a facility.

Even older generations have embraced the use of smartphones equipped with a variety of mobile apps. In security, this allows them to visually screen their visitors, reducing the chance of erroneously letting in unauthorized persons, create temporary credentials for pre-authorized guests; and using the smartphone as the credential.

MOBILE APPS AND CONTACTLESS ACCESS

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), respiratory droplets can land on surfaces and objects. It is possible that a person could get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus and become infected when they touch their own mouth, nose or eyes.

Contactless mobile devices make it possible to access multi-tenant structures without a keypad or a card reader of any kind for both apartments and gated communities. Of course, there are pros and cons in doing so. For example, while this approach provides hands-free access, especially when there's an electronically-controlled entrance, if internet service is lost for any reason it can result in a lock-out situation. Therefore, a backup access method is often warranted.

One way to achieve hands-free access is to install a small QR coded sticker on the outside of an entry door or on a gate kiosk. When the user's smartphone camera scans the sticker, it will send the decoded data to a centralized controller over Wi-Fi or the smartphone's connection. Another technical methodology combines cellular with a single-relay unit that's designed to receive the appropriate code via cellular means, thus retracting the gate or releasing the door.

The smartphone-based credential was a market trend even before CV19. One powerful reason for this is the fact that almost everyone carries a mobile device. As a result, the majority of access reader manufacturers are responding to this trend. In fact, some of them have already added support to near field communication and Bluetooth.

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ADDING VIDEO TO TELEPHONE ENTRY SYSTEMS

When most people think of mobile apps in access control, they think of the smart doorbell. This market is dominated mostly by DIY products while apartments, condos and gated communities have a similar need to allow visitors through shared entrances. Residents in these communities now demand the same video calling features that simplify their lives, more companies are responding to this trend by releasing video enabled visitor call boxes.

Because of this trend, there's a growing demand for it across the board. Access control integrated with video enabled communication through an outdoor call box positioned at the drive-up gate and additional doors into the building. Visitors use the system by selecting the resident from a directory list, usually by a touchscreen display or a numeric telephone-style keyboard.

The call box will then facilitate a video conference call between the visitor and the selected resident. He can then identify the visitor both visually and audibly before granting access, whether he is on site or away. Using the phone app, he can also provide a temporary digital credential to pre-authorized visitors, perfect for the weekly landscaper, pool cleaner or for hosting a party without having to answer the phone all day.

More sophisticated smartphone apps not only provide video calls and issue temporary guest passes, but also cater to all of the needs a typical community resident may have. Residents in modern communities are demanding features like electronic reservation of party rooms, gym classes, equipment, cashless vending machines and electronic voting systems, just to name a few. These features are typically unavailable in traditional telephone entry and access control systems without an accompanying mobile app.

SELLING SUBSCRIPTION-FEE BASED SYSTEMS

Due to the continuous costs related to maintaining a software app, some manufacturers charge a subscription fee, like HID Mobile Access, or a one-time purchase for the phone-based credential, usually at a much higher price than a card/fob. However, a few companies provide the app for free. Be sure to check your options before buying. 📱

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