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Industry insights

2017 Trends to watch

By Brad Aikin

With the start of each new year, there is a concerted effort to identify “the next big thing” on the horizon. What will consumers be asking for? What new technology could potentially revolutionize the industry?

There are a number of trends that will impact the industry in 2017, but they can all be summed up in one word: convergence. Specifically, the convergence of mechanical and electronic physical security solutions. There’s a common misconception that convergence involves the cannibalization of old technology by the new, but what it really means is the merging of distinct technologies or devices into a unified whole. The old complements the new and, in doing so, results in higher customer satisfaction, lower operating costs and higher margins.

The Internet of Things

The transition from keys to cards is a familiar theme at this point, but it was merely the beginning of the convergence. With enhanced security, efficient management and greater convenience, electronic access control hardware and credentials have become a core component of the security solution for commercial facilities around the world. Consumers are expanding their physical access control systems into parking garages, warehouses, storage units and other buildings not connected to their main facility. They want increased security, and they expect their comprehensive facility to be conveniently accessible with a single card.

However, the next phase of the convergence involves the Internet of Things, or IoT. Of all the technology trends currently taking place, the IoT is the most revolutionary in terms of its ability to completely transform the way we live and serve customers.

The simplest definition of the IoT is that networks and smart devices connect and share information with each other to enhance the collective experiences of the system administrator and end user. This is done by using the appropriate blend of electronic credentials and remote connectivity to complement what historically has required parties to be collocated to communicate and exchange goods.



Building design and specifications

The emergence of the IoT has spurred new trends in delivering designs that provide unique experiences for the user. As technology and electronic access hardware continue to evolve at a rapid pace, architects have more options, greater flexibility and fewer compromises to make from a design standpoint. Not only are aesthetics and electronic security living together more seamlessly within a building, but also, together, they’re providing a richer, more robust user experience.

There are more tools available to serve customer needs and integrate them in ways once not even imagined. For example, at a hospital in Minnesota, the access control and badge system allows doctors and nurses to reserve sleeping quarters—offering an advanced level of workplace efficiency and convenience. Additionally, a performing arts school in New York uses a similar system to allow students to reserve practice rooms and verify their use.



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What's most exciting about this trend is that it is no longer solely for higher security applications. More and more buildings—of all sizes and security levels—are starting to take advantage of integrated access control in order to deliver both efficiency and convenience in security and other applications. We're seeing this shift because the ROI is now more evident, as seen in HVAC and lighting applications. As we understand more about the capability and reliability of these systems, the idea of implementing them becomes more feasible. Architects can design visually appealing and functional buildings that integrate comfort, convenience and efficiency in new and exciting ways.

It's critical that architects have an ongoing conversation with their clients about designing electronic access control as an integral component of the user experience in a space. It's likely that those who were not open to it a few years ago may have a vastly different perspective today as door hardware and technology have transformed into an intelligent part of a building's ecosystem.

Open architecture

Although the pace at which the convergence is occurring is rapidly accelerating, the speed with which facilities can incorporate this new technology will vary wildly based on a number of external factors. Fortunately, the rate at which they make the transition is entirely customizable. An entire campus can be upgraded one building or one door at a time, giving end users the ability to incorporate the new technology in stages as their budgets allow.

Clients particularly value this level of flexibility because they want the solution they select today to be upgraded and expanded over time as their needs change. They want a viable, integrated solution that can meet current safety and security issues, as well as accommodate emerging technologies that will allow the system to expand and adapt as needed in future. Such solutions should be able to operate current technologies as well as those under development without compromising or risking investments in their present systems.

Open architecture electronic locking systems address all of these concerns. They easily accept additions, upgrades and replacement of components to the security system or the system itself. The structure eliminates proprietary constraints that would force them into a specific product or brand, ensuring they have many options to choose from both now and in the future. Open standards provide access to critical data and information within the system. It also helps to protect an access control investment for years to come. As security needs change, the access control system can be changed by adding new credential technologies, a variety of network protocols, increased security levels and system expansions. Upgrades don't require replacing all the locks or even taking locks off doors to retrofit.

Of course, the success of such a transition will depend, at least in part, on the selection of the right manufacturers and associated partner ecosystems. There are many physical access control products and solutions from which to choose, and it's important to remember that at any given point, you're not just choosing a single product. You're likely partnering with a manufacturer that can support a dynamic blend of mechanical and electronic applications in a manner that is cohesive and reliable. A solid manufacturing partner can help you most effectively apply the various products and technologies together more easily.

Conclusion

It can be argued that the fundamentals of access control have not changed in decades: security, reliability and efficiency. What has changed is the range of tools available to serve these needs as mechanical and electronic technologies continue to converge.

The IoT represents a fundamental change in how we securely and efficiently manage physical access control and creates the potential to dramatically increase productivity while improving the overall experience for users. When mechanical and electronic solutions converge, operational costs decrease, satisfaction rises and security improves.



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