Before electronic lock solutions, facilities relied solely on manual locks for security and access control. Now that electronic access control and integration are widely available and can be more affordable, many prospective customers are ready to step up from their existing mechanical solutions. However, as technology continues to evolve and the portfolio of options expands, customers are often uncertain—or overwhelmed with—how to select the best system for their needs.

As an integrator, your expertise can play a critical role in helping customers choose the right access control solution. You can help them understand the many factors that they need to consider, including facility age, credential management platform and protocols, budget and long-term security strategy.

Performing a security audit is an effective way to help prospective customers overcome these obstacles to the sale, and can provide you with the information you need to recommend the right solution for their needs.

Start with a plan.

For some customers a security crisis is what prompts them to upgrade to electronic access control. And when a problem arises, many people's first reaction is to solve it quickly. However, before rushing into a decision, it is important to get the right people together for a planning meeting to develop a practical solution that aligns with their building, their budget, how the system will be used and by whom. Some clients may know what they want, but the fiscal planning may occur over a period of time, and implementing access control becomes a multi-phase initiative.

In the planning meeting, it is important to discuss the issues that most impact which solution will make the most sense for the client, including:

- The access control system's anticipated use and its overall intent.
- The necessary policies and procedures for access control.
- How the implementation of access control fits into the company’s overall security plan.
- The barriers and limitations to implementation.

Planning the system also includes considering the needs of the system outside the main building. Today’s systems now extend access control into parking garages, warehouses, storage units, etc. to provide even greater security, management and convenience. Successfully adding to the security perimeter requires careful evaluation and credential planning.
Another issue that must be considered during planning - and your clients may not have thought of - is the demands access control will place on bandwidth and internal networks, so it makes good business sense to involve the IT department early. With electronic access control growing significantly in the marketplace—topping $3.5 billion globally in 2014—you're likely to cross paths with IT now more than ever before. Taking a collaborative approach confirms that IT infrastructure is up-to-date and all products will be equipped to work in the future.

During the planning phase you may find yourself asking questions your client has never considered before. Your guidance can help lead them toward a solution that works for them and that they feel confident in using. Here are some examples of what to discuss early on to ensure the most optimal outcome:

- What are your current lockdown procedures?
- How long does it take to lock down?
- Do you practice lockdown?
- How many users will your system have?
- Do your users have varying security levels?
- Do you have a crisis management plan?
- Who manages your security?
- How do people move through the building on a daily basis?
- How do people move through the building after hours and/or on weekends?
- What are your goals for electronic access control solution?

Identify the right type of solution.
After you have established the overall system needs, budget and IT requirements, the next important decision is determining if the client is looking for a networked security system, a standalone one, or a combination of both.

Multiple buildings on a campus or business site present a complex situation, with different types of buildings requiring different levels of security. Not every door in the facility has to be a controlled entrance, nor is it always necessary to have 100 percent, 24-hour control. The building's construction can also play a role in determining the right solution, since it can be difficult to wire a system in an existing or historical building. Networked locks that connect to a central access control system give you the flexibility to build a system that includes both hard-wired and wireless locks.

Wireless locks are increasingly becoming the solution of choice, both for convenience and aesthetics. Wireless locks help you avoid a host of installation hassles. How do you identify doors that are good candidates for a wireless solution? Here are a few common scenarios in which wireless is likely your only option:

- An existing door (especially if it's fire rated), or an opening set into stone or a fancy surround like the door on the left.
- A door that would require the wiring to be run in surface-mounted conduit.
- A location in which drilling into the walls or ceiling would create too much dust or would interrupt a busy workspace. (For example, in healthcare facilities, there are specific procedures that must be followed to protect the air quality for patients and staff.)
- Exterior installations that would require digging deep trenches for wires just to integrate an exterior gate or a remote access door.

Recognizing the value of wireless solutions allow you to help your client secure doors that were traditionally difficult to run wires to in the past and increase the security throughout their facility. A wireless solution also allows for a quicker installation that causes minimal disruption to their environment. Perhaps most important to your clients, a wireless installation is much faster than one that is wired, so the installation is finished quickly and cost-efficiently.

It's important to remember though, that not all wireless locks need to be networked to function effectively. Standalone wireless locks may be a good solution for some or all doors, depending on the scope of the installation, and are a good solution for clients who may not have the IT infrastructure to support a fully networked system.

Take advantage of the flexibility of modular design.
Today, integrators are challenged with helping their customers choose access control systems that can be upgraded over time and as needs change to create a viable, integrated security system. They need systems that can meet current safety and security issues, as well as accommodate emerging technologies that allow the system to expand and adapt as needed.
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 systems are the answer to meeting the security and technology needs of today and tomorrow. It is important to educate your clients about modular, open architecture electronic locking systems – they are unlikely to know what this terminology means and will rely on your expertise to understand what this technology is and why it makes sense for them. Open architecture will allow them to customize door openings with the right solution for each door, including credential readers and network communications, to create a perfect fit.

You will be able to help them understand how they can upgrade readers and network modules from an offline program to a networked solution, change credentials at any time, and use future innovative technologies as they emerge. Your clients may even be surprised to learn that, in many cases, upgrades do not require replacing all the locks or even taking locks off doors.

Modular designs are trending upward in popularity because they allow access control solutions to be configured in multiple ways, depending on the need of each opening. With technology continually changing, the modular design gives customers the flexibility they need to support and manage various types of openings with different access protocols and uses. Modularity also allows a single system to include multiple credentials, depending on the opening requirements.

Select the right credentials.
Credentials are another piece of the access control solution puzzle. In any given facility there are multiple openings to secure, and multiple people who need access. Varied layers of clearance, employee turnover rates, and a long list of other factors play a role in dictating exactly which credential solutions make the most sense.

In today’s world, security comes down to much more than putting a key in the lock and turning it. While there are some openings where a mechanical key may still be the best bet, in most case upgrading to an electronic solution is the best bet for effective and reliable security. Helping your client understand their credential options and what credential works best will be an important part of planning and implementing their access control solution. Issues to review and consider include:

- Are they choosing a networked system where issuing and managing card credentials make sense?
- Do they need to integrate cashless vending with their credential system?
- Will they be integrating time and attendance into their access control system?
- Are the locks being accessed in an interior or exterior location where weather may be a concern?
- How deeply will they want to monitor each user's access and movement within the facility?
- Does everyone have the same level of security clearance or is there a need for multiple security/access levels?

Remember that you are not just an installer, but also an advisor.
In today's changing society, there are more decisions for your customers than ever before, and helping them find the right solution is important to completing a practical security plan. Each new sales lead is not just the opportunity to make a sale, but also an opportunity to build a lasting relationship that will lead to repeat business for your company. The end result will be an access control solution for the present and future, and a satisfied client willing to refer you to others.

To find out more about how Allegion can help you implement the right solution for each customer, or about our electronic access control solutions visit us online at www.allegion.com.