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Peas in a Pod

Electronic door locks and kiosks form a perfect union for self-storage

By Tim Seyfarth

In recent years the buzz has been about incorporating the Internet with management tools, adding call centers to increase store traffic and utilizing kiosks. These all add value to the business either by slimming the accounting and record-keeping functions, increasing occupancy and adding customer conveniences.

Many owners have turned to technology to keep their sites safe and sound for round-the-clock business. Integrated electronic door locks and kiosks reduce--sometimes eliminate--the need for a manned office. These two technologies offer huge yield potential for self-storage.

Let's review how the system works: The tenant enters a PIN at the gate-entry keypad. If the tenant is current, the gate opens and the tenant's unit(s) are unlocked. If, on the other hand, the tenant is past due, the keypad will not open the gate, but will display a message instructing him to pay at the kiosk to gain immediate access to units. Once paid, the electronic lock automatically removes the over lock.

It's important to note that this system doesn't create a bailment, because the electronic lock is not the primary lock. The unit is still secured by the tenant's lock and key, relieving management of liability.

Jumping Hurdles

Security offers many challenges, but a well-planned system can overcome many of them. For example, customers often prefer convenient services, 24 hours a day. It's not practical to man your facility 24/7, but the electronic lock system teamed with a kiosk can perform many management duties:

- * Rent units
- * Collect fees
- * Over lock units
- * Remove over locks when rent is paid

Security systems today can help resolve the problems faced when land is scarce and prices are high. Sites may be manned by the new technology, eliminating the need for office and living space. Non-traditional sites can be designed to stand alone or as part of a satellite system of facilities. Other benefits include:

- * Electronic door locks keep vacant units locked until rented
- * Normal operations are easily monitored.
- * If the gate fails to open, managers are alerted.
- * Battery back-up options keep systems operating even if there is a power outage.
- * Customers gain 24-hour convenience.

The Satellite Concept

Some owners are incorporating the electronic door locks and kiosk combination in sort of a spoke-and-hub design. A super site is constructed of approximately 80,000

feet including a first-class retail area and apartment. Surrounding this super site about 2 to 5 miles away are significantly smaller sites about 100 to 200 units in size. These satellites are equipped with electronic door locks and kiosks for normal operation. As part of regular job responsibilities, the managers of the super site clean and maintain the satellite sites.

A combination of products is recommended to up the level of security at facilities: well-placed cameras, excellent lighting, commonsense construction and building design, individual door alarms and keypad access gate control.

In addition, the electronic door locking system can provide an active system to continually monitor the site. It monitors the door status (open/closed) as well as the condition of locks, gate position and its own system status. The results of this monitoring may be sent to the security system's provider. Abnormal results can be managed by one of the technicians remotely, or if the conditions warrant, a service provider can be dispatched to the location to correct the problem. Kiosks work similarly.

The technology is here. As the use of electronic locks and kiosks grows, so too will the methods of lowering human-resource costs, maximizing land use and extracting the most profit from future self-storage locations

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