

The Benefits of Visitor Management/ Self-Badging Kiosks

As companies become increasingly concerned about security, kiosk technology is being used to control who has access to a particular facility.

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The Johnson Space Center, popularly known as “Mission Control,” is home to the U. S. astronaut corps and is responsible for training astronauts from both the United States and its international partners.

The facility, which consists of approximately 200 buildings spread across 1,620 acres, employs about 3,200 civil servants, including 85 astronauts. In addition, more than 11,000 contract employees work onsite or at nearby facilities.

As part of the effort to ensure that only authorized personnel enter the Johnson Space Center, security officials require that everyone passing through the facility’s gate present an identification badge.

To streamline the process of visitor and employee management, NASA installed a visitor management kiosk at the facility’s main gate. Users simply insert their driver’s license into a card reader and the kiosk compares that information with the information in the facility’s database. The kiosk snaps a photo and automatically prints a temporary badge.

“I have a number of people a day who forget their badge,” said Alan Mather, chief

of the Protective Services Division at the Johnson Space Center. “Rather than have them interact with customer service to replace a forgotten badge, we automated the process.”

Johnson Space Center is the first NASA facility to make use of a visitor management kiosk. For now, the kiosk is



At the Johnson Space Center, a visitor management kiosk (seen above) helps ensure security and streamline the check-in process.

devoted to issuing temporary badges for existing employees, retired employees, retired astronauts and others who are in good standing at the facility.

The visitor management kiosk was provided by Roosevelt, N.Y.-based Parabit Systems Inc. Parabit's visitor management/self-badging kiosk is a robust self-service solution for visitor registration.

"Parabit has always focused on client interaction," said Rob Leiponis, president of Parabit. "Our manufacturing abilities and a comprehensive design team allow us to provide the best solution for any self-service need. The end result is a product which exceeds the client's expectations and a solution which enhances self-service."

"We are very satisfied with how it's working out," Mather said. "It looks sharp and it's very easy to use. Ultimately, we want all visitors just to be able to go to



Kiosks that run software from EasyLobby help companies control access to their buildings, even without an attendant present.

[Visitor management kiosk] software can verify whether the visitor is expected or has been in the facility before and makes sure the visitor is not on a watch list.

the kiosk rather than one of the customer service representatives, but we're taking baby steps."

Integration with access systems

Visitor management/self-badging kiosks can offer a host of functions for companies and other organizations seeking to control access to a particular facility.

Through the kiosk, a visitor's photo can be captured either by scanning a driver's license or passport or by taking a photo with a Web cam. The software then can verify whether the visitor is expected or has been in the facility before and makes sure the visitor is not on a watch list.

Visitor management kiosks can pre-register visitors to more tightly control who is authorized to enter a particular facility. Upon arrival, kiosk users can print professional-looking, full-color, customized badges with a check-in process of less than 20 seconds.

"There are a lot of cases where the lobby of a building is unattended, but the company wants to identify the people who are visiting that building," said John Murzycki, director of marketing with Needham, Mass.-based EasyLobby.

EasyLobby develops software for visitor management solutions. Parabit's Visitor Management Kiosks are integrated with EasyLobby software.

“In some cases, a visitor badge is necessary to actually access the building, whether it be an elevator or a turnstile or some other device, where the visitor badge incorporates a barcode to activate the elevator or turnstile,” Murzycki said.

Controlling the flow

With the enactment of accounting rules such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, businesses need to be aware of who might be in a particular facility and can gain access to company records. For medical facilities, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 provides for stiff penalties in cases of unauthorized access to medical records.

With the business world becoming increasingly competitive, companies need to be concerned about new products or initiatives and how easy it might be for an outsider to access information about those products.

“If visitors are in your building on an errand, they could stumble across any type of intellectual property that you might want to protect,” said James Crowley, manager, vendor products, at Pittsford, N.Y.-based Lenel Systems International. “That is a risk to your organization.”

Lenel is a leading provider of software and turnkey security systems for corporate and government markets.

A visitor management kiosk also can be programmed to have visitors electronically sign a nondisclosure agreement or read safety information prior to being granted access to a facility.

Although those may be the obvious concerns, some of the not-so-obvious ones



Visitor management kiosks ensure privacy, so those without access to the system cannot see who is entering the building.

include inadvertently letting visitors know who else has been at the facility.

In cases where a lobby attendant is in charge of tracking visitors, the primary control mechanism is a spiral notebook where visitors sign in and out. A vendor, who also might be working with a competitor, can simply look at that spiral notebook while signing in to see who else has been visiting that facility.

“They may be able to figure out if you are working on a project,” Crowley said. “But if you have a well-controlled visitor management system that includes a kiosk, that information is secure and can’t be seen.”

Of course, there are still situations where it may still be necessary to have an attendant

Features and benefits of a visitor management/self-badging kiosk

- More accurate screening of visitors
- Overall lower costs by eliminating physical staff
- Streamlined check-in process, with less than 20 seconds from entry to printed badge
- Detailed visitor information captured quickly and accurately
- Professional-looking, full-color, customized badges can be printed
- Emergency evacuation report with a list of who is in the building at any given time, and can be provided to emergency response personnel
- Multiple programmable security alerts and automated online denied-party and sex-offender screening for tighter security
- Pre-registration of visitors via the intranet/Internet to more tightly control who is authorized to enter

on duty, such as at a school. Even in those situations, a visitor management kiosk may be a worthwhile addition.

“A visitor management kiosk also can be quite useful in lobbies that do have attendants,” said Murzycki. “Kiosks allow visitors the option to self register and check out, alleviating delays and reducing demands on the lobby staff. In the long run, it may be less costly than adding additional lobby attendants to deal with the flow of visitors.”

Managing liability

There also is a question of a company’s responsibility regarding the behavior of a visitor to its facility. Aside from simply knowing who is accessing a particular facility, visitor management kiosks can help organizations avoid dangerous situations.

“It’s getting harder and harder to prove that you are taking all of the steps you can in order to provide a safe working environment,” Crowley said. “You want to know who is in your building at all times.”

In the case of a lost or stolen badge or access card, not only is it necessary to provide a replacement, it’s also necessary to make sure the old badge isn’t used in an inappropriate manner.

Indianapolis-based Stanley Securities Solutions, for example, offers an access-management kiosk for college campuses that quickly can provide a replacement identification card for students, using a combination of the student’s school ID number and facial recognition capabilities incorporated into the kiosk itself.

Stanley Securities is a diversified global provider of a number of products,

including mechanical access and electronic security solutions. The company's main kiosk clients are government facilities and college campuses.

"On many college campuses, those cards provide access to all types of campus buildings through access control devices, including the residence halls and the student's dorm room," said Eric Rittenhouse, national vertical solutions manager with Stanley Securities.

"If a student loses a card and it's 1 a.m., a lot of campuses will physically have to send someone, maybe a security person or someone in the housing office, go with the student and let them in with a master key," Rittenhouse said. "The problem is, they may not remove the lost card out of the system until the next day. During that time, anyone who finds the card can use it to access the facility."

With Stanley's kiosk, as soon as the student receives a replacement card the old one is deactivated.

"Our software pushes that information down to both the hardwired access controllers at the residence hall door, for example, and down to the wireless controller on the door of the student's room," Rittenhouse said.

In general, the kiosk can help campuses cope with the flood of new students each fall, saving both time and money.



Visitor management kiosks help college campuses save time and money when issuing student ids.

"On check-in day at the beginning of the semester, the school could have 7,000 students lined up out to the street at the card office waiting to get a card for their dorm rooms," Rittenhouse said. "Instead, they could have five or six kiosks strategically placed around the campus and not have to deal with it."

About the sponsor: Parabit Systems, based in Roosevelt, N.Y., is a provider of products and services that enhance self-service and improve security. Since 1985, Parabit has been a leader in the design, manufacturing and integration of many self-service solutions. Parabit also provides access control, surveillance and telecommunication solutions.