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Access control provides building-wide solutions

By Joanne Friedrich, contributor

The integration of various systems with access control, whether they are security-oriented or functional, continues to expand with the development and refinement of software.

"You used to have disparate systems out there that wouldn't communicate," said Tim Rohrbach, chief technology officer at MDI Security Systems.

But now companies are looking to bring together certain building and business functions, using the access control system as a conduit. These systems, said Rohrbach, are both scalable and modular, so they grow as a company's needs increase.

The most common integration he sees is populating the access control system with an accounting software system that has a human resources function, so companies can easily register and delete employees from their databases.

Other functions that may be integrated via software with access control range from time and attendance to visit management to HVAC, he said. Under a true integration situation, he said, a third-party system is integrated into MDI's product and runs as a module "becoming part of my infrastructure."

The other option is to interface systems, which Rohrbach said means running them side by side.

There are two main areas where Andrew Bulkley, director of product strategy at GE Infrastructure, Security, said he sees integration with other systems taking place: IT and building infrastructure.

"Access control is being asked to integrate with IT systems," he said, combining credentials that control both computer log-ins and building access. This is especially true, he said, "in the government space."

"The other piece is (integrating) with other building infrastructure," he explained, though Bulkley said this isn't happening at the same level of concentration. Regulations such as HIPPA and Sarbanes-Oxley, which are designed to protect the privacy of information and corporate accountability, "are pushing the logical physical tie between the (access control) card and the person," he said.

There are fewer drivers on the building operations side, he said, so companies with fixed resources will spend it first where they have the requirement.

Bulkley said the technology in the cards themselves is enabling a lot of the IT/physical access convergence. "Smart cards are here now—and will be for the next 10 to 15 years."

Video integration is another area that is taking off, said Greg Goldman, chief executive officer of Synergistics. "People are focused on video integration," he

said, including both IP camera systems integration and web-based systems.

Matt Barnette, senior business development manager at Amag, concurred that video is a common tie in for access control and can occur seamlessly via software.

"If they have an alarm, we bring the video to them," he said. "Video is a big tie in."

Other systems integrations Barnette has witnessed include baby abduction monitoring systems in hospitals, secondary monitoring of fire systems, IT network privileges and human resources. "More customers are tying in their HR," he explained. "The data flows to the security management system."

Aiding the integration, said Barnette, is the ability to make systems as open as possible "so they can change and morph as business models change." This can sometimes mean working with standards set by other industries, such as building management or fire systems "because in the security business, there aren't as many standards as in other industries," he said.

Although integration can and does take place at many levels, Jay Vaitkus, product and market manager for systems integration development at Stanley Security Solutions, said customers aren't yet seeking a one-step solution.

"Customers are skeptical that someone can handle everything," he said, such as building automation and access control. Where the focus seems to lie, he said, is in tying in functions that complement access

control, such as video and intrusion.

On the institutional side, he said, there is a need for access control to work with human resources programs and time and attendance products. In the education

field, he said, access control products are now interfacing with student meal card programs, which give students access to their rooms, campus facilities as well as allow them to buy books and food. **SSN**

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