

Integration of Visitor Management with Access Control Systems



Bringing them Together

Introduction – Why You Need It

This white paper provides a description of the integration process between HID Global's EasyLobby® Secure Visitor Management (SVM™) software and a variety of access control systems. It is written to present a description of the “why” and “how” of the integration process between EasyLobby SVM™ and access control systems.

Organizations today face a myriad of security challenges at their facilities. Managing the access of authorized personnel into a facility is a major concern. The primary challenge for many organizations is to secure their facility from unwanted personnel while also allowing a free flow of people who have a legitimate purpose in engaging with the organization.

Complicating the issue is that guests, contractors, vendors and business partners require and expect certain levels of access to people within their organization. Organizations employing enhanced visitor security are those organizations that establish guidelines and controls which first provide authorization for entry and then authentication of the identity of the guests.

Organizations generally handle the flow of visitors into their facilities in one of two ways:

1. Visitors and guests are always escorted by an employee or host
2. Visitors and guests are allowed unescorted access to facilities

Organizations that always escort visitors through their facilities do not need to integrate their visitor management system with their access control environment. The employee or host will always be able to gain access to any doors with his or her credentials.

The integration of visitor management with access control becomes necessary when guests are allowed free access to a facility and are not always escorted by a host.

If an organization wishes to provide visitors with unescorted access to their facility, below are reasons for integrating an existing visitor management solution with access control systems. An organization will want to be able to:

- Allow certain authorized visitors or contractors the ability to move through the facility unescorted (when appropriate, or as an option)
- Limit unauthorized personnel from entering restricted areas
- Track activity of everyone – including visitors – who have entered and left the facility

Integrating an organization's visitor management system with its existing access control system allows the two systems to work together to grant entry to authorized outside personnel and is the ideal solution for visitor management.

An Environment Without Visitor Management

Before explaining the integration of HID Global's EasyLobby Secure Visitor Management software with access control, potential issues may arise when there is no integration or visitor management system in place.

In many organizations – even those that use an access control system – visitors and contractors are still being asked to sign a paper visitor log. It is estimated that as recently as 2008, no more than 10% of access control systems were integrated with a visitor management system. While the paper method of keeping track of visitors is perceived as quick and easy, it provides little security and poses a number of other problems, including the following:

- Names are often illegible, or are false
- In an emergency such as a fire, it is impossible to quickly determine who is still in the building (check out times are not always required or enforced)
- Information regarding who has visited the company is readily available for everyone to see, but this information should be confidential (and in some environments it is mandated by law to be confidential)
- The paper log, and hand-written visitor badges, presents a poor image to visitors and communicates a message of lax security

In an un-integrated scenario, regardless of whether there is a visitor management system in place, visitors are normally asked to first sign in to a guest book, are given a sticky badge to wear, and then are sent to the security office for a proximity card, or other access control credential to allow access through various doors. This two-step process is cumbersome and time consuming.

In an attempt to streamline the two-step process, organizations often provide a stack of live, pre-programmed proximity cards to the receptionist at the front desk. When guests arrive the receptionist simply hands them one of the cards to allow access.

This procedure, while quick and easy presents a number of security risks.

Cards can easily be stolen or unintentionally left unguarded. Anyone obtaining one of the cards then has access to the facility.

Another security risk takes place when visitors depart from the facility. Visitors can walk out of the facility with the card, which means they now have a card with access to the facility. There is typically no record of who was given a specific card. To remedy these problems, EasyLobby has set out to both streamline the multi-step process and safeguard an organization's facility.

The integration between EasyLobby and most leading access control systems is a natural development and enhances the functionality of both systems. Although most access

systems do a great job of tracking employees, traditionally they have not done so well in tracking visitors or temporary guests.

HID Global's EasyLobby Secure Visitor Management solution provides enterprise-class visitor registration, tracking, reporting and badge printing, web-based pre-registration by employees, package and asset management, and employee time and attendance capabilities that make it an ideal fit to augment the capabilities of access control.

HID Global EasyLobby Integration With Access Systems

To address the security problems of handing access cards to visitors and/or contractors, both large and small organizations have implemented a professional visitor management system and integrated it with their access control system. From the beginning, EasyLobby's goal was to integrate with access control systems so that only one step would be necessary when granting guests access credentials.

EasyLobby SVM is tightly integrated with over 40 of the most popular access control systems. For the complete list of companies integrated with EasyLobby, visit the HID Global website at www.hidglobal.com.

The EasyLobby integration with access control is a one-step process. It does away with the need to send people to the security office for access credentials. The proper access can be granted right from the EasyLobby SVM because only a limited number of access groups are made available, so the lobby attendant cannot grant access to restricted areas by mistake.

The EasyLobby integration allows organizations to grant temporary card or barcode access to certain visitors or contractors directly from the EasyLobby SVM visitor form at the time of check in. The information entered into EasyLobby is seamlessly passed to the access control system. A proximity card for the visitor is activated in the access control system using the information entered into EasyLobby.

When a visitor with an access card leaves a facility they will automatically be checked out by EasyLobby resulting in a secure facility even if the visitor mistakenly takes the card with them due to the system passing the expiration date and time to the access system. The access card will no longer be valid after this date and time. If the card was stolen, it will not be able to open anything.

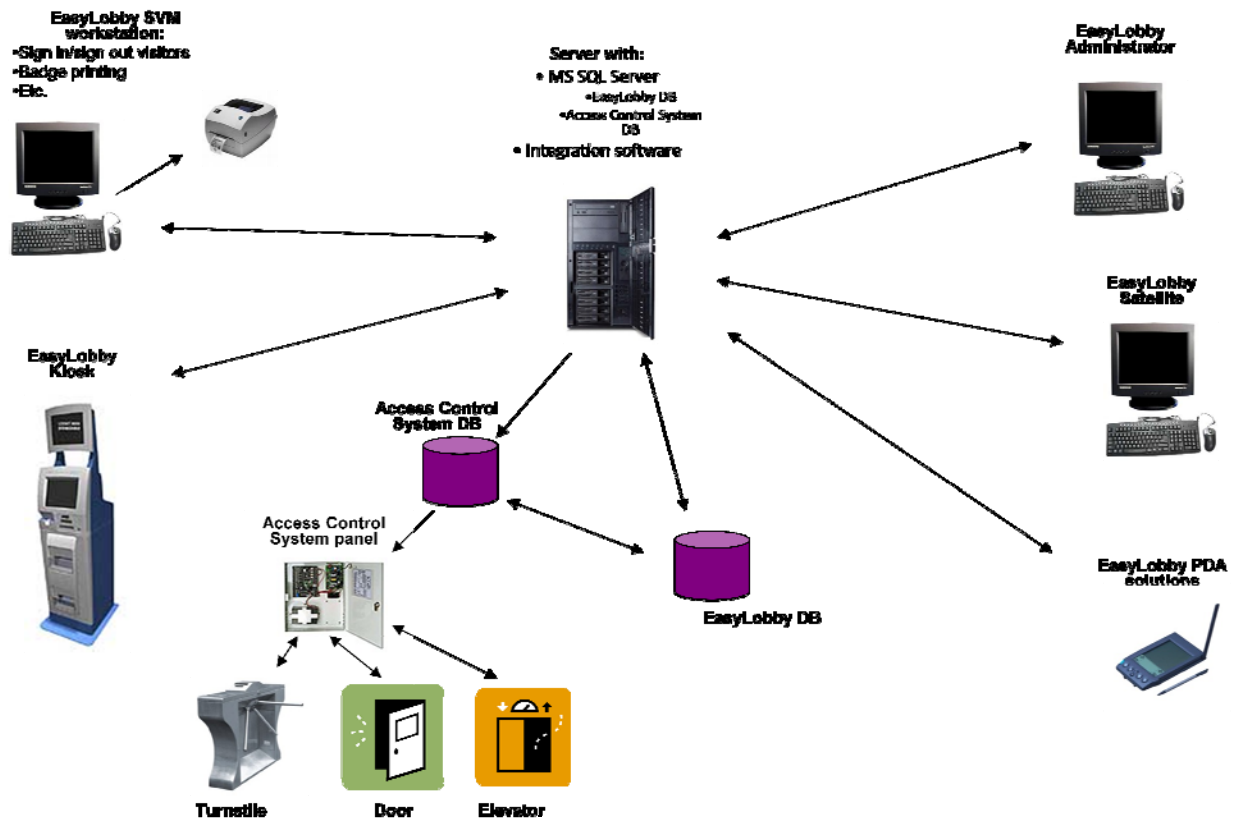
Employing EasyLobby integration with an organization's existing access system eliminates the problems associated with having a stack of live cards left at a reception desk to hand to visitors.

The EasyLobby database also has a record of all visitors that were given an access card providing a complete audit trail. Administrators can review the records of exactly who was provided with a card and what dates and times the card was active.

System Topography

How do all the pieces fit together? The following diagram demonstrates how EasyLobby SVM is integrated with an access control system and how the various features of visitor management come together in one cohesive system.

EasyLobby system layout with access control integration



How the Integration Works Together

HID Global's EasyLobby Secure Visitor Management software resides on a Windows® computer, typically at the reception desk and automates the entire process of registering a visitor and printing a badge.

In some integration processes with access control systems, the EasyLobby database must be resident in the same SQL server or MSDE instance as the access control database. In other environments, the databases can reside on different servers. A configuration and installation utility is provided by EasyLobby SVM that allows users to install the integration between the two systems and configure a variety of settings.

Once the integration is established, using the access control system GUI, customers can create access levels appropriate for visitors and/or contractors and create matching categories or clearances in the EasyLobby SVM GUI. When a visitor is checked in using EasyLobby SVM, the integration trigger in the EasyLobby database is executed, which creates a new cardholder and card in the access control system. The card number will be either the barcode number automatically generated by SVM or the proximity card number loaned and assigned to the visitor by the guard or receptionist.

When using proximity cards, the cardholder record is only created when the proximity card field is populated in the EasyLobby visitor form. EasyLobby supports USB attachable proximity card scanners. These can be used to scan the card number directly into EasyLobby and be scanned for check out simplifying the check out process.

When using barcodes, the EasyLobby software creates an ID number that increases by one with each visitor so that each visitor has a unique number; much like each employee card has a unique number. The EasyLobby system also allows you to confine numbers to a specific range, wrapping when it reaches the top.

When a visitor is checked out of EasyLobby SVM the integration trigger is also executed, which deletes the visitor and badge from the access control database. If a visitor record is deleted in EasyLobby SVM before the visitor has been checked out, this action also causes the trigger to remove the cardholder and card from the access control database.

Integration with a visitor management system, such as EasyLobby will ensure that visitors are granted access to specific areas of your facility determined by the administrator, with the specific access level assigned by the host employee or lobby personnel.

Convergence and the State of Access Control Integration

A “hot” topic in Security publications over the past several years has been the convergence of access control with other IP technologies, or the bringing together of physical and logical security and identity management. For some, the term convergence is used synonymously with the term integration.

Integration between access control and other systems is very prevalent today that it's almost hard to remember that only a few years ago it was not the case. It's difficult to find an access control system today that is not integrated with a variety of other systems – intrusion detection, video and CCTV, intercom, wireless locks and other systems. Not that long ago CCTV, access and alarm management were traditionally separate systems. Today's security managers routinely expect that their access system will have integration hooks to these other systems, including their visitor management system. For most end-users, the bottom line on integration equates to dollars – getting more functionality and economy of scale out of their security equipment.

Conclusions

Business continuity, regulatory compliance, true risk mitigation, optimization of existing security assets and operational efficiencies are all within reach when you deploy a comprehensive and integrated access control solution. Stand-alone, non-integrated access control systems and other security systems are a thing of the past. They are neither operationally efficient nor cost effective.

By gaining control of your environment through highly integrated access control and visitor management solutions, you can strengthen your overall security, improve user productivity, reduce administration costs, enable regulatory compliance and improve the image of the organization as being more security-conscious.

EasyLobby's integration with an access control system helps ensure that an organization is controlling its security infrastructure rather than being controlled by it.

For more information on HID Global's EasyLobby Secure Visitor Management solutions and integration with access control systems, visit the HID Global website at www.hidglobal.com.