

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF THE ACCESS INDUSTRY



EDGAR CHIN

Edgar was previously the President of Assa Abloy North Asia (Japan, Korea and China) for 8 years and has had over 20 years of experience in the lock industry. He is an experienced visionary with an outstanding track record - he has led big-picture strategic roll outs with pivotal roles in operations, mergers & acquisitions, new technology adoptions, talent development and support functions within Assa Abloy.

In this article, Edgar shares his background and experiences, together with his vision for the future of the access industry.

THE EVOLUTION OF LOCKS AND KEYS

Having spent two decades in the lock industry, I've seen how the device progressed from a simple security measure to where it is today. The evolution from its digitised format to a smart one was inevitable as technology progressed.

Today, a lock can do so much more than just keeping your door locked. Most people do not notice how many access points we go through in a day; a journey from your home to the workplace, for example, has multiple touch points where access control is crucial.

As we move forward into an era of smart cities, access control has considerable potential to provide scalable security solutions across a myriad of industries. Rapid global urbanisation can also be attributed to this shift as it influences the industry to change from residential to include industrial applications.

MILESTONES IN THE INDUSTRY

The early 2000s saw pivotal changes for the industry, especially in the APAC region.

The release of the Gateman Rose digital door lock in 2003 captured the attention of the Korean market. While locks were once considered to be purely functional, consumers' wants and needs started to show otherwise. The product was designed to take the aesthetics of a lock into consideration after research found that females were making the final buying decisions. Together with the influence of major TV campaign (first ever in the lock industry) and a 24/7 service network, sales hit a new high in a market where digital door locks were the norm.

With technological advancement, locks moved to incorporate increasingly advanced features to cater to changing needs. Realising that physical keys were cumbersome to manage, more brands were offering digital door locks that did away with them altogether. PIN codes, RFID key tags and the like started emerging and paved the way for smart locks.

THE RISE OF THE SMARTPHONE.

The mobile phone has evolved over the years into something so integrated that it has become an extension of our person. Replacing calendars, calculators, phone books and even our physical wallets, it was only a matter of time that consumers wanted to control locks via their phones too.

From its digital predecessors, smart locks took it to the next level. The mobile revolution has moulded consumer expectations to favour touchscreens, keypads, bluetooth, and all-in-one functionality emphasising ease of use. Brands started to produce locks that mimicked the touch and feel of smartphones, and integrated their products with mobile apps that boasted greater convenience for the user.

With Internet capabilities, it opened a whole new world for the industry to provide access solutions that go beyond the home.

SMARTER SECURITY.

Of all anticipated smart access solution capabilities, analytics is perhaps the most promising. Data can be extracted from the smart locks to spot patterns in access over specific periods, to identify bottlenecks and to examine how to improve processes or services. For example, maintenance personnel that enter a space monthly could be identified and granted access in advance.

The solution can potentially be a valuable source of insights to run operations smoothly. Ideally, they collect data that gives visibility of all things happening in facility, at a scale too big and unnecessary for people to manually monitor all the time. Such data can help complete audit trails, trace movement, ease congestion and improve productivity.

This has also shifted industry focus from vertical to horizontal solutions. Smart locks are no longer just deployed by the residential sector, but across industries globally, with more industrial applications spanning infrastructure management, utility management such as water, oil and gas, as well as logistics management.

Take the Singaporean smart lock start-up, igloohome, for example. They've developed iglooworks, a dedicated line that's designed for enterprises to manage smart access on a scalable level. The smart locks in this vertical put the company on the frontiers of IoT connectivity. The technology is relatively new, but has shown great potential for deployment of large-scale access management.

The smart locks work in tandem with a dashboard and mobile app, allowing users to track activities and lock statuses in real-time. The integration of IoT connectivity also allows for multi-factor authentication for heightened security controls.

The agility of the company has shown how security has adapted to current times. Apart from meeting the needs of the consumer, it is poised to become a key element in cities that are looking to transform into a smarter one.



THE FUTURE OF SMART ACCESS

Smart cities are about being sustainable, energy-efficient and cost-effective.

Moving into the future, I'm seeing the need to create greener products. When deployment is on this large of a scale, smart locks may need to reduce battery usage or not need any at all.

There will also be a need to raise security and safety standards. As we move into a world of virtual keys, data protection is of utmost importance. Data transmission between devices, clouds and servers must adhere to strict protection, security and safety protocols.

Additionally, smart devices need to be much more reliable. For people from different generations to enjoy the convenience and security that smart access brings, the hardware will need to be future-proofed. Industry players must take this into consideration as software upgrades should be supported by the hardware.

The smart access industry is poised to scale at an unprecedented rate. From residential uptake to new industrial applications, solution providers need to stay on their toes at all times. At the heart of it, we must be like water – fluid enough to adapt to new rules, technology and expectations – to stay in this game at all.

