



Visitor Management: A Guide to Selecting and Employing a New Solution

Enhancing safety protocols and security measures drives many organizations to consider replacing or upgrading their visitor management system. In a world where hybrid work is becoming the norm, it is critical to be well-informed about who is authorized to be on-site, who is expected to be on-site, and what areas of your organization guests have access to.

What Is Visitor Management and Why Is It Important?

Visitor management refers to the methods organizations use to admit and track visitors to their facilities. The concept is not new. Many facilities use some form of visitor management, ranging from simple sign-in sheets to high-tech approaches that scan government IDs to capture relevant data. But visitor management is more than a sheet of paper or a technology. It is also a policy that governs the how, why, and who of visitors.

A number of motivations are pushing organizations to explore the possibility of a new or upgraded visitor management system. For many organizations, the primary motivation is increased security. While employees and visitors should immediately recognize the security benefits of an improved visitor management system, additional roles in the organization will enjoy advantages as well. Compliance and legal departments, for example, will appreciate an accurate and retrievable record of the people who enter a facility.

Modern visitor management systems deliver a technology-driven experience that is designed to be faster and more accurate than paper logbooks. They also leave visitors with a positive and memorable first impression of the organization they serve.

As we'll see, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for visitor management, which is why organizations exploring a change will need to consider a number of options. This guide discusses the various elements of deploying a visitor management solution, including the creation of a visitor management policy.

Each organization will ultimately employ a visitor management strategy that best meets its needs. Key factors that will influence this decision include:

- The location of the facility
- The industry in which it operates
- The number of visitors expected over a day/week/month, etc.
- The frequency with which large groups visit

Let's begin by reviewing best practices involved in visitor management.

"One of the first decisions to make when discussing a system involves the information that is collected from visitors."

Best Practices for Visitor Management

Information is central to every element of the modern business, and visitor management is no exception. One of the first decisions to make when discussing a system involves the information that is collected from visitors.

BEST PRACTICES FOR INFORMATION COLLECTION

The decision to admit or refuse entry to a facility, the type of access to be granted, and the establishment of limitations for visitors (i.e., where they can go in a facility) are all made based on the information the system receives. There is, potentially, a great deal of information available for collection from the average visitor. The best approach to sorting out which details should be required from visitors is to ask a simple question: “What’s important to the business?”

Organizations that operate in a highly regulated industry, such as financial services, may find themselves being very granular in their information collection. This might mean asking visitors not only who they are, but also why they are there, what type of meeting they are attending, and who the other attendees will be. Visitors may be asked to differentiate personal and professional visits. Employees acting as hosts might also be required to supply detailed information regarding their guests.

Not every organization faces the same scrutiny as financial services or healthcare, however. One of the biggest challenges facing the information technology industry today concerns rapid data growth. Organizations are creating and storing vast amounts of information, much of which they may never access again. Making visitors supply numerous fields also leads to a less-technical problem — people in a rush will fill in anything to speed up the process. Thus, asking too many mandatory questions can reduce the quality of the data.

To strike the right balance, ask what information is important to the business. Is there any value to knowing the job title of everyone who visits? What about their department? Are addresses necessary?

One good exercise in this area is to think about every possible piece of information you could ask from a visitor and then rank them in order of importance to the organization. Then determine how long it would take most visitors to answer all of those questions.

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The goal is to balance the value of the data with the time it takes to supply it. If your organization has a compliance department, you will want to inquire about information that should not be retained, such as Social Security numbers, home addresses, birthdays, and other forms of personally identifiable information (PII). To better help find the right mix of data points to collect from visitors, keep these considerations in mind:

UNIQUE IDENTIFIERS

Every visitor that interacts with the visitor management system needs a unique identifier — something that lets the system and the people who manage it know that the John Smith who visited on Wednesday isn't the same John Smith who visited on Friday.

Unique identifiers are essential to keeping visitor records accurate and organized. Because people often share names, employers, and home addresses with other people, they will not work as unique identifiers. Other types of information used as unique identifiers in the past (Social Security numbers are a prime example) are now considered too sensitive to provide and store as part of a record.

There is one piece of information almost everyone has today that is unique to them, and that is their email address. Consider making email address a required field in the visitor management system and using it as the unique identifier.



RECORDS RETENTION

The amount of data created and saved by a visitor management system depends, in part, on how many visitors come to the facility in an average day. The amount of data being saved can increase rapidly, resulting in a visitor management system that runs more slowly because there are more records to search. The storage of records can also create problems for compliance.

It is important to establish a records retention schedule and enforce its use. A records retention schedule governs how information is saved and for how long. The schedule will cover when data is stored directly in the system and the point at which it gets moved to a secondary storage medium, such as tape or the cloud.

Creating and following a records retention schedule will improve system performance, make records easier to locate, help comply with industry or government regulations, and reduce litigation risk. It is common to store data in the system for at least 90 days, and then to move it to an archive for a period of one to three years, but the timeframe depends on the organization's needs.

STANDARDS RELATED TO VISITOR MANAGEMENT

Because there are regulations that govern when and how information is stored and shared, it's a good idea to become familiar with the standards that apply in the area of visitor management. Some will pertain only to organizations in particular industries; others will depend on the geographic location of the facility. The European Union, for example, has more strict laws around privacy and data collection than the United States.

Here are a handful of regulations that potentially involve visitor management:

- **Payment Card Industry (PCI) standards** are used to help protect the information on payment cards. Organizations that work with payment card data are required under the standard to restrict physical access to data or systems that house cardholder data to prevent the unauthorized access to or removal of devices, data, systems, or hardcopies. Organizations need to maintain a physical audit trail of their visitor information and activity and retain the logs for at least three months.
- **Health Level Seven® (HL7)** pertains to the healthcare industry. It helps organizations ensure that electronic patient data remains secure at all times by standardizing the data and the way it is used. Visitor management systems come into play here because they may connect to other systems in a healthcare facility.
- **Other standards around personally identifiable information (PII)** can impact visitor information systems as well. Once again, it will depend on location and industry. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), another healthcare industry regulation in the United States, is just one example.
- **Standards regarding information security**, such as ISO/IEC 27002, which establishes a code of practice for information security management, are the basis of several regulations and corporate policies regarding access to systems and data.

Up to this point, we have discussed best practices related to visitor information, but best practices related to the visitors themselves should also be established.

BEST PRACTICES RELATED TO VISITORS

Depending on how many visitors the organization has on a daily basis, it might make sense to request or require that visitors be pre-registered. Pre-registration helps the receptionist or security personnel prepare for the day, including planning for VIP guests and busy time periods that will require more staff. Pre-scheduled visitors can also be checked in faster because some or all of their information is already entered into the system prior to their arrival on site. If some or all visitors require escorts, pre-registration will help ensure the escort is available when the guest arrives.

If you do decide to pre-register visitors, make it easy for your staff to schedule and invite them. Doing so should be as easy as simply creating a calendar invite, entering necessary visitor information, and sending it directly to the host and visitor. Not only does this save time for visitors upon arrival, but this also incentivizes your staff to pre-register visits because it makes their job easier. It also ensures a streamlined recordkeeping process for every visit.

PLANNING FOR LARGE GROUPS

Another best practice to establish early in the visitor management discussion is how your organization will manage large groups of visitors. Start by determining how many people constitute a large group for the facility, and who is most likely to be inviting them.

Groups can be treated as individuals or use a different process that identifies them as a group. If the facility treats each member of a group individually, then they will all have to check in before they are admitted to the facility.

Other questions to ask include:

- Will everyone in the group be issued visitor badges?
- Will groups require an escort?
- Are there enough staff members available to assist in processing large groups?

Once decisions are made around the type and quantity of visitor information to be collected, the next step is to decide what physical set up is right for your organization.

Physical Set Up: What's Right for Your Organization?

The physical set up of the visitor management system will go a long way toward shaping a visitor's first impression of the organization. The primary goal of the physical set up should be to integrate security in a welcoming and inviting way.

It is important to think about the physical experience of visitor management and the impression it leaves on visitors and employees, the technology the system uses, and how visitors will be identified within the facility.

The following points will illustrate these key considerations:

PLACEMENT OF THE CHECK-IN STATION

Regardless of whether it is a standalone kiosk or a desk with a receptionist, place the check-in station in a place that's easily accessible and has enough room to allow a short line to form. Consider how visitors will enter the rest of the facility. Is there a single point of entrance or several paths out of the lobby area? Is directional signage necessary? Some companies choose to design their lobbies in such a manner that the front desk welcomes visitors but blocks direct access to the rest of the building when they first check in.

MANNED BY A PERSON VS. UNMANNED OPTIONS

Some organizations will choose to have an unattended lobby, which means it is crucial their visitor management system and the physical space itself are set up for success. Important questions here include: How will visitors enter the lobby? Do they need to be buzzed in, or is there open access from the street? Who will be able to answer any questions they may have?

TABLET OR KIOSK?

Organizations that choose a self-check-in option can use a tablet or a larger kiosk. Tablets represent modernity, and they create a very tangible check-in experience using touchscreen technology. Another advantage of tablets is their size. Tablets are small enough to fit on a desk and work well when space is at a premium. A kiosk usually requires more physical space, but it also brings with it a larger physical impact. A kiosk is easier to see across a lobby and will be recognized by visitors as the place where they can check in.

ID SCANNERS: UNDERSTAND THE LEGALITIES

Some organizations will consider using ID scanners to gather information from drivers' licenses or other government-issued IDs. Once again, this will involve setting a preference around which data is saved to the system. Consult with the compliance or security team and learn about any local laws regarding the use of personal information. Also, create a workflow that covers how to enter information when a visitor does not have an ID or refuses to share her ID.

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BADGES VS. STICKERS

Not every organization requires visitors to wear some form of identification when they are in the facility. The same goes for employees, who may or may not display some form of identification throughout the day. Visitor identification can range from the very simple, like a piece of paper or cardboard that says “Visitor” on it, to high-tech badges with details and a photo on them. Some types of visitor passes will expire, while others are created with re-use in mind.

Here are the pros and cons of the most popular options:

- **Generic Visitor Passes**, such as a sticker or card that says “Visitor” with no additional details, are inexpensive and easy to source or replace. But they are also very easy to replicate and offer few details regarding the visitor and why he is there, thus providing very little in terms of security.
- **Printed Sticker/Label Passes**, such as those designed with a company logo and that contain some visitor information, offer better security because they can display important details, have the option of including a photo of the visitor, are more difficult to duplicate, and can be self-expiring to prevent unauthorized re-use. On the other hand, stickers and labels can feel less professional than a badge, the photos printed on them may be pixelated or low quality, and people simply do not like wearing them because (among other reasons) they can be damaging to certain fabrics.
- **Printed Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) Passes** are plastic badges that can be designed with a logo and feature a photo and visitor information. These badges are seen as more professional and carry a fairly high level of security. The photo quality is usually quite good, and the passes can be re-used by frequent visitors. But the higher quality means a higher cost, and these passes do not self-expire.

To help ensure employees are on board with a new visitor management solution, including its physical setup, generating understanding and enthusiasm for the system is paramount.

GETTING BUY-IN FOR A VISITOR MANAGEMENT SOLUTION

Introducing any type of change into an organization can pose a challenge. If the employees at a facility are accustomed to a visitor management process that relies on paper logbooks (or perhaps no visitor management system at all), they may be apprehensive about a new approach. For example, they may now be required to head to a lobby to escort visitors or answer the phone to verify a guest.

Because these changes will require employee buy-in, it is important to stress the benefits of moving to a visitor management system by sharing relevant resources and training with them. That may mean sending a mass email, scheduling in-person meetings, or updating a company newsletter. When employees understand why the move to a new visitor management system is being made, they are more likely to adhere to the visitor policies.

The following messages will resonate with many employees:

1. More Professional. A visitor management system can help the organization project a more professional image, especially when it is automated and streamlined. It will eliminate messy hand-written visitor badges and illegible paper logbooks. It can potentially pull information quickly and conveniently from a government-issued ID.

2. More Secure. Workplace safety is a more familiar issue for many people than it was a few years ago. Everyone at the facility benefits from knowing who is there, who they are visiting, and where they can be located. In case of an emergency, a visitor management system can easily produce a list for the authorities indicating who may be in the building.

3. More Compliant. A modern visitor management system will allow the organization to create and distribute professional looking reports for audit and compliance purposes. It will also better protect privacy by doing away with unsecured paper logbooks.

To help facilitate adoption of the new system, the next step is to create an internal visitor management policy.

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Creating and Implementing a Visitor Management Policy

BEST PRACTICES RELATED TO VISITORS

The visitor management system is used to execute the organization’s visitor policy. If no written visitor policy exists, one should be created and re-visited on an annual or bi-annual basis to ensure that it is still appropriate for the workplace.

This written policy should include details such as who is allowed to invite visitors to the facility, the hours visitors are allowed, if an escort will be required or not, and if any areas are off-limits to visitors. Making these types of decisions up front and communicating them to employees will set the standard for success.

Other things to consider as part of the policy include the use of escorts, back-up plans in case there is a problem, and how to use watch lists.

ESCORTS OR UNATTENDED?

Some organizations will require large groups to have an escort.

Other organizations will require that all visitors be escorted within the facility. The question of escorts vs. unattended visitors is critical and should be addressed early in the planning of the visitor management strategy. Why is this so important? Because it will set the standard for how visitors move within the facility and drive expectations for employees/hosts. Like most decisions, there are pros and cons of requiring an escort.



The pros include:

- Someone accountable to the company always knows where the visitor is
- It can feel welcoming for visitors to have someone meet them in the lobby and escort them through the building. Not requiring an escort can be the equivalent of yelling “let yourself in!” when someone rings the doorbell.
- Increased security: No one from outside the company can look around at items left on desks or listen in on workplace chatter unattended
- Escorts ensure that your visitors make it to the proper meeting area or office
- An escort confirms that the host is on site and ready to meet with the visitor when she enters building

The cons of requiring an escort include:

- Employees must meet their visitors at the front lobby and stay with them for the duration of the stay, which could hamper productivity
- Requiring an escort can be a nuisance when you have multiple visitors a day or the host is already at the meeting room setting up
- It can be hard to enforce when some types of visitors may not require an escort. Who escorts the elevator repair technician as he does his job? Does the CEO's husband need an escort to her office? Vending machine replenishment? A vendor that visits every Tuesday?

If it is decided that only some visitors will require escorts, it's important to clearly define who will fall into which category and determine if you want to visually differentiate them. One possible solution is to have color-coded visitor badges, so employees can clearly see who should be with an escort and who is allowed to be in the building unattended.

The messaging that is used to explain the new visitor management approach to employees is crucial because the net result of the cons listed above is that employees will not follow the policy.

CREATING A BACKUP PLAN

Even with the best planning, policy, and technology, things can always go wrong. It is best to be prepared and to create contingency plans for visitor management before they are needed.

Organizations moving from paper logbooks to a new visitor management system, for example, should retain those logbooks because when the power goes out or the system crashes, paper and pen may be the best fallback option. Anyone who has tried to make a credit card purchase during a network outage knows the old carbon paper and imprint machine suddenly re-appears because it is easy to set up and does the job well enough to keep the business running. The same idea applies here.

The back-up paper logbook should contain all the fields the visitor management system would normally capture. The plan should also cover what will happen to the information in the paper logbook. Will it simply be retained on paper logs, or will it be entered into the visitor management system when it is available again?

DEALING WITH WATCH LISTS

There are many types of visitors to the average facility, including vendors, technicians, salespeople, and family members. Some of these visitors will receive different treatment than others upon arrival. Visitor management systems, such as HID Global's EasyLobby® or WorkforceID™ Visitor Manager, allow users to screen visitors against internal or external watch lists. Some visitors can be designated as VIPs, and when they register, they will be treated a certain way or escorted to a certain area. Other people can be marked as Do Not Admit (DNA) and will not be allowed into the facility. Another possible designation is Be on the Lookout (BOLO).

The visitor management policy will determine what happens when someone registers and hits on one of these watch lists. Do BOLOs and DNAs require that security be notified? Are VIPs escorted to a certain office or lounge? Creating a plan in advance will help create a quick, seamless experience.

ON-PREMISE OR CLOUD BASED

Whether your organization is searching for a visitor management solution to be deployed on-premise, in the cloud, or you are not sure what type of solution works best with your organization, HID's diverse portfolio of visitor management solutions offers a range of powerful yet flexible options for any busy lobby.

Regardless of if your organization's visitor management system is on-premise or in the cloud, worrying about whether it integrates with other aspects of your organization such as access control systems or identity and access management systems should not be a cause for concern.

A strong visitor management system should integrate with current and legacy access control providers, as well as any other identity, HR, and system integrations you already have in place regardless of how that visitor management solution is deployed.

CONCLUSION

Modern visitor management systems can benefit businesses, employees, and visitors if they are part of a well-developed strategy that is created in advance of their deployment. The decisions that need to be made can generally be divided into five areas that cover information collection, the visitors themselves, the physical setup of the system, a plan to encourage buy-in from employees, and the creation of a visitor management policy. Visitor management systems touch many parts of the organization, from information technology and security to the facilities, legal, and compliance teams. Communication and planning that involves all these groups is the key to a successful launch and quick return on the investment.

Learn more about HID Visitor Management Solutions at www.hidglobal.com/visitor-management.



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