The Evolution of Visitor Management:
Navigating Security and Convenience in the Digital Age

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Even in today's virtual and digital-forward world, in-person interactions remain essential. A positive visitor experience sets the right tone for any business, whether it is a retail or healthcare operation or a B2B organization interacting with contractors, partners, and customers.

> Effective visitor management means providing optimal experiences that balance convenience and security, ensuring safety without friction. As customer expectations change and technologies advance, organizations must reimagine their approach to visitor management to remain competitive.

Frost & Sullivan recently spoke with J. O'Brien Company, a leading provider of physical security services and visitor management solutions (VMS). The conversation offered valuable insights into the changing landscape of visitor management and how businesses can prepare for the rapidly evolving market.

At the forefront of J. O'Brien's visitor management expertise is Mike Piana, co-owner, Partner, and Vice President of Sales and Marketing. Piana brings over a decade of experience designing and implementing innovative VMS. His deep understanding of complex client needs has allowed him to deliver efficient, user-friendly solutions that leverage cutting-edge technology and data-driven insights.

"The pandemic necessitated the implementation of more robust visitor management systems that can handle health and safety protocols, including contactless check-ins and health screenings," says Piana. While security and visitor experience remain dominant considerations for the industry, Piana says new technology-driven features such as automation and cloud adoption are changing how these considerations can be addressed.

Complementing Piana's leadership in sales is Chris Droussiotis, the Manager of Professional Services at J. O'Brien. Droussiotis and his team ensure that clients receive comprehensive support, from the initial implementation to ongoing system maintenance. Continued VMS optimization addresses clients' unique needs and ensures the long-term success of their visitor management systems. "Our clients had to rapidly deploy or reconfigure the VMS solution to enforce new policies [during the pandemic]" says Droussiotis. As a result, he adds, "Customization has been more of a requirement post-COVID."

Market Dynamics: A Shifting Landscape

External demands and internal technological progress influence the VMS industry's evolution. From the external customer standpoint, "Businesses are seeking functionalities such as mobile access, pre-registration capabilities, integration with existing security systems, and real-time notifications," states Piana. "Enhanced reporting and analytics tools are also in demand to improve operational efficiency." Other external factors reshaping the industry include:

- Continued global health considerations and the need for contactless visitor experiences

- Intensifying customer expectations for seamless, personalized visitor interactions

- Growing emphasis on data privacy regulations and heightened security concerns

- Increased automation in visitor processing, such as document scanners and pre-registration

- Evolving visitation policies responding to changing business needs

- Increasing acceptance of cloud-based visitor management platforms that can provide a myriad of benefits, including increased flexibility and innovative features

Piana says these demands are leading to the expansion of features such as check-in kiosks, bring-your-own-device (BYOD) capabilities, and advanced host notification systems.

A key to J. O'Brien's ability to stay at the forefront of visitor management services is its strong partnership with HID, a leader in secure identity solutions. This collaboration allows the company to deliver cutting-edge VMS that leverage the latest advancements in security technology. Together, J. O'Brien and HID ensure their clients, regardless of industry or location, benefit from robust, reliable, and tailored solutions.

Technology Drives Market Evolution

Advancing technologies are also having a marked impact on the industry. For example, "New software enables a wider variety of customization that allows for more flexibility when configuring a system to a client's specific visitation requirements," says Droussiotis. Other new technological factors include:

- **Predictive Analytics and AI** for advanced data analytics and machine learning for improved decision-making

- **Biometric Identification Systems** such as facial recognition and integration with identity management platforms

- **Mobile and Cloud-based Solutions** that provide flexible access and real-time reporting tools

- **IoT Integration,** which enhances smart building management

- **Access Control and Notifications** for advanced host notifications and temporary access control systems

Droussiotis says that at the top of the list for many customers are "automation and self-service, documentation acknowledgment, and advanced visitor data retention, which means determining what visitor personal identification information (PII) is retained and for how long."

Interconnectivity is another pivotal force in software development for VMS. "By enabling seamless integration between various systems and platforms, interconnectivity enhances the efficiency and functionality of visitor management solutions. This integration allows for real-time data exchange, streamlined operations, and improved security protocols," says Piana. He points to how interconnected systems can "automatically update visitor logs, sync with security databases, and provide instant notifications to relevant personnel." Advanced interconnectivity between VMS and other business systems helps businesses balance their dual priorities of optimizing the visitor experience and overall security.

External demands and advanced technologies combine in the VMS space to create a dynamic landscape of new features and opportunities. As Piana tells Frost & Sullivan, "These forces are significantly shaping the market by driving the adoption of more advanced and integrated visitor management solutions."

Value Chain Partnerships Ensure Security and Seamless Interactions

Security—for visitors, staff, and company property—has always been one of the main reasons that organizations want to identify, register, and monitor visitors. Compliance with security requirements has a broad-reaching scope that stretches across government regulations, industry standards, and company policies. The ability to provide highly customized—but still affordable—security solutions is a growing competitive differentiator as technology advances. "Most industry verticals have baseline security requirements, such as a school system that must perform background screening on all visitors, for example," says Droussiotis. A security service provider needs the expertise to help customers navigate their industry's requirements and tailor VMS to the particular business and location.

However, businesses increasingly want to provide a seamless experience for both visitors and staff without sacrificing security. "There is a high demand for contactless solutions, real-time data analytics, and enhanced security features that ensure compliance with health and safety regulations. Additionally, customers seek easy-to-deploy solutions with kiosk-friendly interfaces that facilitate quick and efficient setup, ensuring minimal disruption to their operations," Piana notes. The challenge to VMS providers is providing solutions that meet all these needs now and can evolve over time.

According to J. O'Brien Company, security solutions will increasingly need to support more third-party integrations, growing demand for mobile credentials, and more interactions between VMS and other company systems. Partnering with the right suppliers will be vital for security providers wanting a competitive advantage. J. O'Brien Company's partnership with HID, for example, enables a full solution approach: software, hardware, and accessories, which helps create seamless project planning, deployment, training, and ongoing support.

Security solutions emanating from strong value chain partnerships are particularly necessary for large enterprises, which often have numerous departments, facilities, locations, and even policies to contend with. "These organizations require centralized management of visitor data across multiple sites, ensuring consistent security protocols and seamless integration with various enterprise systems," says Piana. Large organizations need "scalable solutions that can adapt to the diverse and dynamic requirements of different locations," according to Piana, who adds that large enterprises also need robust reporting and analytics tools to monitor, analyze, and report on visitor patterns, compliance, and security incidents across sites. Piana says it is important that systems can leverage advanced identity management platforms, such as Okta and Microsoft Azure, as well as demonstrate their adherence to high-security standards, such as ISO and SOC2 certifications. To help ensure compliance and operate smoothly, interfaces should also be user-friendly, often including self-service kiosks and mobile access options.

"HID offers a variety of visitor products tailored to meet the diverse needs of organizations," says Piana. These products include scalable access control with flexible billing by location or user, advanced mobile credentials, intuitive interfaces, and regular updates to meet industry standards. Piana credits HID's "combination of diverse product offerings, flexible billing, and innovation" for making it a leading industry supplier to the security services space.

An example of a customer utilizing a partnership such as J. O'Brien Company's and HID's VMS would be a large corporate office complex. Such a customer "leverages the full suite of integrations offered by HID's system, including access control, identity verification, and real-time visitor tracking," says Piana. Visitors pre-register through an integrated online portal and receive their visitor documentation via email. Pre-registration identity verification through connected government ID databases also shortens on-site check-in and boosts security. "Once on-site," says Piana, a visitor's "entry is seamlessly managed through integration with the building's access control system, granting them specific area permissions. This interconnected setup ensures enhanced security, streamlined operations, and a superior visitor experience, showcasing the powerful capabilities of HID's visitor management solutions."

Future Considerations for Visitor Management

Droussiotis says large enterprises should take key steps to start off on the right path with a security solution provider: "Record ALL visitation requirements and policy prior to starting a VMS initiative," advises Droussiotis. "If those items are easily accessible, then a solution provider will be better able to deploy a system that enforces all necessary policies." Droussiotis continues: "Maintain all annual service and support contracts, and provide clear communication guidelines, such as who owns the system client-side and who determines policy." These details help the security provider stay abreast of—and even anticipate—any changes to the system from Day One.

Piana notes, "Large enterprises should choose scalable and flexible solutions that integrate seamlessly with other business and security systems." Enterprises need to prioritize data security and compliance to rigorous industry standards; they should embrace cloud-based management systems for convenience and resilience; and they need a partner proficient in providing "a comprehensive solution with necessary software, hardware, and accessories, along with expert guidance in planning, deployment, training, and support," says Piana.

Next Steps: Ensuring a Secure, Visitor-friendly Experience

For a business needing to augment or upgrade its VMS system, the process begins with a thorough needs assessment of the organization's specific requirements and challenges. Piana says this "involves collaborating with key stakeholders to gather detailed information about their current systems, security protocols, and operational workflows." After this initial phase, Piana outlines the following steps:

- **Planning and Design:** Developing a detailed implementation plan that outlines the project scope, timelines, and responsibilities

- **System Integration:** Ensuring compatibility and seamless integration with existing systems and infrastructure

- **Configuration and Customization:** Tailoring the solution to meet the specific needs of the organization, including configuring self-service kiosks and advanced host notifications

- **Testing and Validation:** Conducting rigorous testing to ensure the system functions correctly and meets all security and compliance requirements

- **Training and Support:** Providing comprehensive training for staff and ongoing support to ensure smooth adoption and operation of the new system

As the landscape of visitor management continues to evolve, businesses must prioritize security and convenience to ensure a positive visitor experience. The integration of advanced technologies, such as AI, biometric systems, and cloud-based platforms, along with strong partnerships with providers like HID and J. O'Brien Company, enables organizations to meet the complex demands of modern visitor management. By embracing flexible, scalable, and interconnected solutions, businesses can effectively navigate the challenges of today's dynamic environment, ensuring they remain ahead in an increasingly competitive market.

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