



Visitor Management Systems: Meeting security, operational and privacy needs

Innovations enable digital, on-site visitor management.



Introduction

Keeping track of visitors to public, commercial — and even private — buildings has been a tradition for centuries through visitors books. As far back as the end of the 19th Century, manufacturers of commercial visitors books were setting up shop in New Zealand and Australia.

In 2011, Australia introduced specific workplace health and safety laws that included a requirement for organisations to keep track of all people on their premises, including the purpose of the visit and their contact details.

For most organisations, a simple visitors book with carbon paper was enough to fulfil this requirement. The visitor filled out the form, placed the top copy inside a plastic badge and left the carbon copy with the receptionist. They then wore the badge (or didn't) throughout their visit, before handing it back to the receptionist (or not) as they were leaving.

This system obviously couldn't enable businesses to gather sufficient information about their visitors to ensure reliable security and safety. In the event of an incident, knowing a person's name and, perhaps, the company they worked for, wasn't enough for emergency services to determine whether that person was truly accounted for. The critical need to capture more meaningful and historic information about visitors led to the development of digital visitor management.

Digital visitor management has since become the standard, as it provides a way to more accurately and efficiently check people into the facility when they arrive, including being able to print out badges with the person's photograph and other identification information. In case of an emergency, the information can be accessed from offsite, letting emergency services check to ensure all visitors and staff have been accounted for.



One of the most game-changing benefits of a digital visitor management system is its ability to dramatically increase a site's security.

The benefits of a digital system

An effective digital visitor management system can deliver significant benefits in five key areas.

01. Efficiency

In busy buildings and lobbies, waiting in line to check in can be frustrating for visitors, particularly if it makes them late for their meeting. A digital system lets the visitor use a simple and intuitive touchscreen to add their details and have their photo taken. The identification badge is printed on the spot. This takes no more time than the average check-in kiosk for a flight and lets people self-serve.

02. Cost-savings

The cost of having multiple touchscreens in a lobby is far lower than employing security and reception staff to manage visitors. A digital system can let businesses lower those costs by having fewer people at reception or by redeploying those people to more value-adding tasks. When receptionists no longer have to supervise the check-in process they can get on with other, more valuable work.

03. Communication

Many business professionals have shown up to a meeting only to find that the receptionist can't reach the person they're there to see. This results in delays and frustration, with the receptionist needing to try to contact the person multiple times or contact multiple people. Using a digital system, employees receive an SMS or email notification as soon as their guest has arrived, without any human intervention required.

04. Safety

Checking into many businesses requires completing a site induction for safety reasons. These inductions usually inform the visitor of any emergency procedures or other site rules to be aware of, such as restricted areas or prohibited activities. Using the digital system, this induction can be completed quickly and efficiently without requiring a lengthy conversation with a person qualified to conduct the induction. This saves time but, more importantly, ensures that all visitors are aware of emergency procedures and other safety information.

Businesses can also use the system to access historical data regarding frequency or times of visitors' access to the building. This can be useful if the visitor is suspected of wrongdoing or if the business simply wants to consider more effective ways of working with selected visitors. For example, the data may determine that it is more efficient for a particular visitor to spend a single, entire day at the office every week rather than visit for an hour or two every other day. Also, it can show who has been exposed to a health or safety risk.

05. Security

One of the most reassuring benefits of a digital visitor management system is its ability to dramatically increase a site's security. With all visitors required to wear a clearly-visible badge that includes their photograph and the purpose of their visit, along with the person they are visiting, it becomes easy to identify unauthorised visitors.

When employees see an unaccompanied visitor, they can first check to see whether they have a badge, then they can offer to help that person get to where they need to go. If the person doesn't have a badge, the employee should be aware of security procedures, whether that includes calling security immediately or personally escorting the person back to the reception area where they can sign in correctly.

Being able to easily identify people who belong in the building, as well as those who don't, can help ensure that workplaces remain secure. This also requires the organisation to build a culture of security to augment the badges and sign-in system.

As well as protecting the organisation itself, this system can help protect the privacy of its visitors. Often, competing sales reps will flick through the visitors' book to see whether their competitors have visited the company recently. This helps them understand which organisations they may be competing with in a tender situation; information that should remain confidential. Keeping visitor information secure in a digital system means visitors can't access that kind of information, maintaining the privacy of other visitors.

The future of Visitor Management Systems

Visitor management systems (VMS) have evolved quickly, as technology has become more advanced and affordable. The potential for these systems to add significant value to various organisations is massive.

Conclusion

The Workplace Health and Safety Act of 2011 means every business must have a mechanism for signing in and tracking visitors. Using a paper-and-pen approach is no longer good enough in this age of heightened security requirements.

Organisations need to look for a VMS that includes key features such as:

- The ability to incorporate unique brand graphics and messaging to the system's welcome screen and badges.
- The ability to customise badges with specific information or identifiers to improve security.
- A notification system that alerts employees via SMS or email when their visitor arrives, minimising the time the visitor spends unattended.
- The ability to generate real-time reports in case of emergency, including contact and emergency contact details for all visitors.
- The ability to restrict access to visitor information, storing it securely in a cloud-based database.
- A non-disruptive workflow that streamlines the process of visitor management, rather than complicating it.

By taking advantage of the latest VMS technology, businesses can improve their site security, safety and efficiency, while saving money and presenting a professional, forward-thinking public face.



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