



The Role of Technology in Increasing Community Control



by Robert
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In today's world of ever-increasing concern over theft and property damage, communities are always looking for innovative ways to try and keep themselves better protected. As technology continually evolves and becomes more affordable, it is becoming more and more feasible to deter negative activity. In ever increasing numbers, people are asking what can be done for them in regard to access control in common areas and access control for the community as a whole, as well as camera applications. Many communities are starting from scratch when it comes to these types of scenarios, but some are not using what they already have in place to its full potential.

Some common areas—such as pools, clubhouses, playgrounds, etc.—are already controlled via lockable gates and doors. The most common issue regarding these areas is the fact that with keys, there are no restrictions on open hours and that most anyone can duplicate the keys with relative ease. The most common solution is a card access system that allows the cards to be assigned to a specific homeowner. In most types of these systems, activity of each card is easily tracked so that the community has a paper trail. Access can also be limited by time of day. When someone moves out or loses their card, it can be deactivated remotely via the programming software. Local companies that install these systems often offer programming services as well.

Many communities that have vehicular access control or gate systems are not taking advantage of the features their system may contain. Most communities make the mistake of providing keypad codes to residents or vendors. The obvious danger here is that keypad codes travel very easily by word of mouth. Keypad codes are often necessary when vendors are involved, but should be changed regularly. It is not an uncommon occurrence to see neighborhoods that have 200 homes have well over 1,000 codes in their system because of lack of maintenance. Just like the common area access control system, most gate systems can be programmed remotely. The lack of maintenance can sometimes be attributed to board of director turnover from year to year. Also, gate cards, remotes,

barcodes, etc. can be directly assignable to individuals in some systems. It is important to keep the system up to date when people move out, change vehicles, or have their devices stolen.

Camera systems are being used more frequently to add another layer of protection for target areas within a community. The aforementioned common areas and gate systems are two places where the systems are typically installed. One of the most common requests for people looking into camera systems is to have the cameras hidden so that people cannot see them. This is a common mistake. The smart move is to make full use of the deterrent factor inherent in a camera system. If the cameras are visible, then they often have the effect of causing the vandal to move on to the next target with no camera system. Signage that states there is a camera system in use (consult your attorney on verbiage) is also recommended. Technology is constantly changing in the camera industry. Software is becoming more and more user friendly. With an Internet connection, cameras can be viewed and footage reviewed remotely and, in some cases, even from your smartphone or tablet.

Camera placement is important. Aiming them at well-traveled areas, such as pedestrian gates and doors, will allow you to see who is accessing your facilities. It also gives the important first impression that the community takes the well being of the area seriously and will not tolerate improper behavior. Other areas people choose to view regularly are gyms, basketball courts, soda machines, etc. It is also important to keep the recording device (most often a Digital Video Recorder—DVR) in a safe and secure location. Locked closets or offices, if available, are often a good choice for this. Another good idea with camera systems is to leave room for improvement and upgrades. For a relatively small amount of additional money, it is possible to get a DVR that can accommodate more cameras for future expansion of the system. Invest in a larger hard drive that can hold more video from additional camera locations.

One of the most important factors in dealing with these issues in your community is to find a local company that can provide you with good service. Access control and camera systems become something that your residents use everyday, but somehow fade into the background. However, when there is an issue, it comes to the forefront of concern because the daily routine becomes interrupted. A good, local service provider that can respond quickly and efficiently can become worth their weight in gold. Remote programming capability can often be a way of taking the burden off of the management company and the board of directors as well.

As technology gets increasingly better, the tools you have with which to better serve your residents' and ultimately your communities' protection needs will improve. They are, however, only valuable when installed correctly, serviced correctly, and managed as necessary.

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