

Club Sentry Adds RFID to Its Member-Management System

The new technology helps ensure that only authorized members gain entry to health clubs and similar facilities, thereby bolstering security.

By Mary Catherine O'Connor

Sept. 12, 2008—Club Sentry, a provider of security and member-management systems for health clubs, swim clubs, homeowner groups and other private, member-based facilities, has integrated radio frequency identification into its product offering. Several of the company's clients, including the Elite Personal Fitness Club in southeastern Michigan, have begun utilizing the new system, while a number of others plan to adopt it, says Club Sentry's president, Scott Rodgers.

Club Sentry is currently offering RFID as a supplement to its existing product offering, comprised of bar-code-based identity cards and key cards. The company is offering its clients RFID key fobs manufactured by access control solution provider HID, as well as HID readers and software that links the RFID tag data with Club Sentry's existing club-management software. The firm's customers have two means of using the RFID hardware, Rodgers explains, and some are doing so in both ways.

One means of utilizing the RFID technology is to enforce access control when a club's front desk is not occupied by an employee checking members into the facility. Club Sentry mounts an RFID reader at the club's entrance. A club member holds up his or her HID key fob—the 1346 ProxKey II model—to the interrogator, which reads the ID encoded to the fob's passive 125 kHz RFID tag, then forwards that data to the Club Sentry software, which queries it against a database of IDs for members in good standing.

If the software succeeds in matching the ID, it triggers the door's electronic lock to open. If it does not find a match, however—which could indicate the person trying to access the club has not paid dues on time, or does not have access to that particular location—the door remains locked.

Club Sentry also offers a bar-code scanner that can be mounted outside an entrance and used in conjunction with a thin plastic key fob—already issued to the members of Club Sentry's customers—printed with a bar-coded number. These members can slide the key fob through the scanner—similar to swiping a magnetic stripe on a payment card through a slot—to access the club after hours (assuming the members are in good standing).

In addition, members issued these bar-code key fobs were also provided with plastic identification cards that include their name, their member ID number encoded into a bar code, and a photograph. When arriving at the club during staffed hours, a member presents his card or bar-code key fob to an employee at the front desk, who then scans the bar code. This triggers the member's name and photo to appear on a computer monitor, so the employee can compare the person's face with the image on the screen to verify that the individual presenting the card is its owner.

Members of clubs that have deployed Club Sentry's RFID key fobs—to whom the club may or may not also issued a photo-based ID—can present their RFID key fobs to an interrogator mounted at the front desk. This triggers the members' photos and names to appear on a monitor behind the desk, so the employee can authenticate those individuals.

The RFID tags and readers employ HID's proprietary Proximity air-interface protocol. The tags, encased in a rugged plastic housing, can be read from up to 1.5 inches from the reader.

RELATED_ARTICLES Rodgers says he was drawn to RFID as a means of bolstering the security of Club Sentry's products. "We have been using bar codes up until now, but they can be copied," he states. "Supposing you lose your card, someone can copy it and make a new one [to enter a club after hours]. The RFID key tags, however, can't be copied."

The company also offers a biometric-based member authentication system, consisting of a fingerprint scanner that members can use to access a club.

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