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The Business Case for Electronic Visitor Management

Helpdesk Paper:
The Business Case for Electronic Visitor Management
WhosOnLocation.com

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Introduction

WhosOnLocation recently conducted a study on reception management and what the key business drivers were when organisations deployed electronic visitor management. It found that for many organisations, if they can report on who is on site, in real-time, and access that information in an emergency, they can meet a wide range of regulatory compliance obligations pertaining to people safety, and evacuation planning. Furthermore electronic visitor management gives organisations greater control over the security of assets, people and IP.

This should come as no shock to health and safety, security, and facilities managers today that already understand and appreciate the value of knowing how many people are currently on site. The challenge comes in identifying who these people are, whether they are being hosted by an employee, or whether they are contractors working alone within the facility. For many organisations the safety and security of people and assets starts with knowing who is on site.

This paper looks at the business case for electronic visitor management, which organisations are adding to their safety and security toolkit to better support their overall safety and security capabilities.

Before we start let's look at the one tool, the manual sign-in register, that has dominated the visitor management scene for decades and why it is on the decline.

Why the manual visitor book is not worth the paper it's written on

Every day, all around the world, receptionists and security guards are asking visitors and contractors to sign into a manual visitor register.

The problem with manual systems is that:

- Due to the physical size constraints of a manual register they don't always accommodate the range of visitor policy information you need visitors to read and acknowledge.

- Information regarding who has visited the organisation is readily available to all other visitors – so visitor privacy is compromised. This information should be confidential.

- Visitors can write in shorthand, use initials only, or have illegible hand-writing.

- Visitor registers can be stolen by anyone visiting the reception area.

- In an evacuation it is impossible to quickly determine who is still in the building. It is often difficult to read the names of people in a visitor register, and if the visitor register is left at reception, there is no way of accessing the names.

- The visitor register and handwritten visitor passes present a poor image of your organisation as unprofessional and not caring about security.

- If facilities or security require a report on who was on site, for how long, and when – paper visitor registers make gathering meaningful data time-consuming and prone to errors and inaccuracies.

- Visitor registers need to be stored somewhere.

- With the availability of cloud-based electronic visitor management, visitor registers and branded visitor passes are often more costly than electronic options.

Overleaf we examine the key business drivers for electronic visitor management.

Regulatory and Compliance

The business case for electronic visitor management starts with compliance and your legal obligations. All organisations have a duty of care to ensure that people who may be affected by the organisations undertaking remain safe at all times. This includes employees, visitors, and contractors.

Compliance of course can come in regulatory and organisational policy form.

Government Regulations

Regulatory compliance centres around Occupational Safety and Health, Workplace Safety, and other practices which relate to the preventative, punitive and compensatory effects of laws that protect people's safety and health; for example:

Australia:

Under the Workplace Health and Safety Act 2011, an employer has a legal obligation to ensure the health and safety of everyone in the workplace - workers, customers and visitors.

In addition major hazard facilities are obligated under the Health and Safety Regulations 2011 to ensure that a person other than a worker who enters the major hazard facility is as soon as practicable:

- informed about hazards at the major hazard facility that may affect that person; and
- instructed in safety precautions the person should take; and
- instructed in the actions the person should take if the emergency plan is implemented while the person is on site.

Furthermore, under Schedule 16, 5.1 of the regulations employers must have procedures for the safe evacuation of, and accounting for, all people on site. Failure to comply with the above can result in penalties.

Similar Legislation and penalty regimes exist around the world for example (source Wikipedia):

United States

In the United States, the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 created both the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). OSHA, in the U.S. Department of Labor, is responsible for developing and enforcing workplace safety and health regulations.

United Kingdom

In the UK, health and safety legislation is drawn up and enforced by the Health and Safety Executive and local authorities (the local council) under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

New Zealand has the Fire Safety and Evacuation of Buildings Regulations 2006 which obligates employers and/or building owners to have in place procedures that provide for the occupants (employees, and visitors) to be evacuated to a place or places of safety so that all the building's occupants can be accounted for.

Canada

In Canada there are numerous regulations like the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Smoking in the Workplace Act (Ontario), and the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations which obligate organisations to know who is on site, to notify people of hazards, and to account for people in an evacuation.

Organisational Policies

When drafting your business case for electronic visitor management you should consider the following factors:

- If your organisation is asking visitors to prove who they are what credentials are considered acceptable and what actions should be taken for exceptions?

- Do you have any items that your organisation would consider a 'banned' item. That is; if the visitor has them on their person, they must surrender them to the reception or security team on arrival. How would you receipt such surrendered items.

- What areas of the site can the visitor access based on the credential and the issuance of a badge, and will an escort be required for other areas?

- Is it a requirement to record if the visitor would need assistance to evacuate the site? Do they have an obvious disability?

- Is it the employee host's responsibility to escort them from the site in the event of an evacuation?

- Can employees pre-register a visitor or must they be approved by a line manager first?

- How does the tracking of visitors fit into your evacuation planning?

- Organisations are morally and legally obligated to notify visitors of any hazards. Electronic visitor management allows organisations to not only notify visitors of hazards but also to capture and record their acknowledgement of the hazard. Furthermore, electronic visitor management supports non-acknowledgement flagging and alerting to your reception, security, or OSH team. Do you operate an environment which may expose visitors to hazards?

- Are we breaching any privacy laws by using a paper-based system which allows other visitors to see other visitor records?

Improved Security

Electronic visitor management supports your organisational security like paper based systems cannot by providing a wide range of security enhancing functionality:

Verification of identity: Who is the person seeking access to your building, site, campus, factory etc. and can they prove that they are who they say they are? Electronic visitor management can support the recording and capture of personal identity information from business cards and/or other commonly used forms of identity like driver's licenses and passports.

Visitor badging: In some organisations it is not possible to personally know every member of staff. Issuing visitor badges enables your people to identify non-staff and allows them to question or challenge people that appear to be in a restricted area.

Visitor badges that are manually filled out can be unreadable and subject to inaccuracy. Electronic visitor management allows you to automatically issue visitor passes which can include the name of the visitor's organisation, who their host is, their photo, and even the limitation on their visit, be it time limitation or a restricted area limitation.

Capture visitor photo: Electronic visitor management allows you to capture visitor photos and store them for later reference if required.

Firstname Lastname
FROM
Friday
TIME IN: **16:04**   27-01-2012
PASS NO: **2342**

Visiting
Firstname Lastname

VISITOR

Capture   Store   Print

Validation of the visit: Does the visitor have a valid reason to visit your organisation. Many electronic visitor management systems support visitor pre-registration allowing reception and security users to validate the rights for the visitor to be on site.

Screening for restricted Items (contraband): Does your organisation prohibit certain items like mobile phones, cameras, or even jewellery to be brought on site. For example food-processing plants prohibit anything that can be carried by a person into the facility that could be left behind or accidently dropped into any part of the food-processing line. Electronic visitor management allows you to record and inventory those items surrendered by the visitor so that they can be returned to the visitor when they leave.

Watch Lists: Screen unwanted guests from your facilities by creating watch lists. This allows you to identify people such as disgruntled former employees, competitors, or malicious people from entering your facilities.

In summary, your business case for electronic visitor management should take into consideration facility security.

Improved Reception Productivity

A study by WhosOnLocation across 100 reception areas around the world showed that it took receptionists, on average, 1 minute and 8 seconds to track down the host of a visitor when a visitor had signed into a paper visitor register or book.

There is a simple calculation you can run to see the direct cost of managing a visitor through reception. You need to calculate to the best of your ability:

V = Visitors per year

AT = Average Time taken to track down an employee (in minutes and seconds)

TH = Total Hours taken per year tracking down employees (multiply **V** x **T** then convert to hours.

R = Reception hourly cost of engagement

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Calculation is: **TH x R**

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Example where:

V = 4800 Visitors per year (20 per day for 48 weeks a year)

AT = (1 min and 8 secs) Average Time taken to track down an employee

TH = 91 hours which is the Total Hours taken per year tracking down employees (**V x T** then converted to hours).

R = $21.63 which is the Reception hourly rate of employment based on $45k p.a and 2080 working hours per year.

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Calculation is: **TH x R** or 91 hours x $21.63 = **$1961.54** per annum

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There are of course greater costs than just the receptionist's time and so the business case for electronic visitor management is actually stronger than depicted here in our calculation.

The above does not take into consideration:

- The actual cost of the phone calls a receptionist might have to make if calling the employees mobile phone and;

- The opportunity cost if the receptionist is employed to do other tasks that are more valuable to your organisation than tracking down employees and;

- The cost of the manual / paper registers. These sometimes run into a hundred dollars+ if branded and;

- The cost and time to manually write, assign, and issue a visitor pass or badge and;

- The potential time costs of getting reports from a manual system.

So where are the productivity gains?

Modern electronic visitor management systems will auto print labels, auto notify the employee via email and or sms (text) when the visitor checks in, and deliver real-time reporting instantly from the reporting tools – saving valuable time and resources.

Evacuation Management

Nobody expects an emergency or disaster – especially one that affects them, their employees, and their business personally. As mentioned in the 'Compliance' section, you have a duty of care to your visitors in the event of an emergency.

Emergencies may be natural or man-made and include the following:

- Fires
- Floods
- Hurricanes
- Tornadoes
- Armed Offender alerts
- Earthquakes
- Chemical spills
- Explosions
- Civil disturbances
- Workplace violence resulting in bodily harm and trauma

Your business case for electronic visitor management should consider how you would communicate to visitors' instructions on what to do when an emergency situation arises and include evacuation escape procedures and route assignments, such as floor plans, workplace maps, and safe or refuge areas.

Electronic visitor management can not only include visuals of escape routes and exits but also instructions on what to do – with each step requiring the visitor to read and acknowledge the instruction.

Many electronic visitor management systems today will support the capture of information that can be used to verify the safety of people in the event of an evacuation:

- How many visitors are on site now?
- Whom are they visiting?
- Did they indicate they require assistance to evacuate when they checked-in?
- What their mobile numbers are so your evacuation wardens can verify their safety if they are not accounted for at the assembly point.

So how does electronic visitor management help?

Modern electronic visitor management systems will enable you to access evacuation reports from outside of the situation of risk; using mobile devices.

There are several systems that also have built in safety verification tools. Functionality like this mitigates the need for any reception team to return to the situation of risk to uplift the visitor register – potentially saving time and lives.

Reporting

A manual, handwritten visitor log can provide a great deal of data and yes, it is possible to gain insights from paper systems but you are relying on legible handwriting, accurate entries, and secure storage of visitor registers that can be retrieved at a later date. It is unnecessarily time-consuming to analyse data from paper systems and gain any meaningful insights from them.

One of the most powerful tools available from an electronic visitor management system is its ability to provide **real-time**, automated reports based on user-selectable criteria in the visitor management database.

Electronic visitor management systems often present data visually (see example below) as well as provide tools for accessing the data that sits behind the reports.

Big Data for the Whole Enterprise

Unlike paper systems electronic visitor management enables you to gain invaluable insights into visitor presence and traffic across your entire organisation – regardless of the number of locations or facilities you have.

Good electronic visitor management systems will enable you to quickly see:

- Who is on site now?
- Who was on site historically?
- Who your most frequent visitors are?
- Which organisation visits you the most?
- How many hours each visitor spends on site?
- Total amount of time visitors are spending on site?
- Who is visiting who, and how frequently?
- What the peak and low periods are for visitor traffic?
- And much more…

Having access to such data allows your organisation to better plan around reception design, resourcing, evacuation planning, and security requirements.

Asset and IP Protection

Your organisation's intellectual property, whether that's patents, trade secrets or just employee know-how, along with your organisation's physical assets are no doubt subject to various forms of protection.

Such protection will consist of inventory and asset management of physical assets, and specific clauses on IP ownership in your employment agreement.

However, your business case for electronic visitor management should take into consideration the fact non-employees are often on site, and have access to both physical assets and IP.

In the event of misuse or even theft of assets or IP your electronic visitor management system provides an excellent tool for reviewing who is and was on site on the day, and the period leading up to, when you believe the theft occurred.

Brand and Service Protection

Electronic visitor management, if deployed correctly, can enhance your organisation's brand and levels of service at reception.

Tip: Handwritten visitor passes and badges scream "we don't care about security".

If your organisation cares about service standards and wants to ensure its branding and reputation for service is reflected in the experience a visitor has when they arrive on site; electronic visitor management help build on that brand experience.

- **Group pre-registration:** Processing a bus load of VIP's in seconds speak volumes for your service standards and reception efficiency.
- **Visitor Kiosks:** What is an acceptable queuing or wait time for the visitors? Electronic visitor management supports visitor self-sign-in kiosks. Multiple kiosks can reduce queuing time.

Business Case Conclusion

Electronic visitor management is more than a product. It's a process. Rather than get caught trying to justify why you want to buy a specific visitor management solution, your time would be better spent preparing an overall business case for visitor management taking an end to end look at the processes and technologies available and how they will best meet your requirements and can be tailored to your enterprise.

About WhosOnLocation

WhosOnLocation is the leading provider of proven, cloud-based people presence management software. We service clients around the world including the government, manufacturing, financial services, corporate, utilities, energy, construction, health, high-security, and education sectors. Learn more at www.WhosOnLocation.com.

Love Your People
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