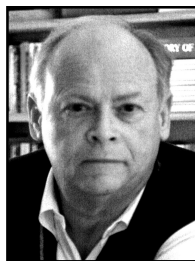


## Access Control: Going to the Next Level

In March 1998, I wrote an article for this column, entitled "It's Time to Throw Away the Keys." The focus was to provide an overview of the advantages of installing access control systems and advice for planning your implementation of these systems with an eye toward the future. At the time, the majority of systems were standalone systems with a dedicated computer for each property. Cryptic programming was difficult to learn and easy to forget. The newest technology, offering a great number of benefits to the customer was the new "central station" version that put the programming in the hands of data entry personnel and programming and reporting was done remotely. The benefits were: no dedicated computer at each property; no cumbersome programming to learn; and customers could call, fax or email required changes to the data entry department without having to be at the specific property.

Those systems communicated over a phone line (usually dedicated to the system, which added expense to the service), and at very slow baud rates which took time. The time required for implementation often varied from 30 minutes to several hours, sometimes as much as a couple of days, depending on workload, activity levels, etc. Although it was aggravating to wait for changes to go into effect, it was better than having to go to the specific property to do the programming in person, and a definite step forward.

In the past 11 years, major growth has occurred. More companies have



**Larry C. Giuliani**

President,  
CornerStone Security, Inc.

chosen to install access control systems, and with that, prices are lower, and capabilities are greater. Biometrics are now affordable. Proximity devices are lower in price than the old "swipe" technology. Credentials range from the original credit card sized card down to a keyfob that is smaller than a car key.

Perhaps, the most exciting new enhancement is the advent of the "Web Hosted" system. With high speed internet, came a new method of communicating and the next step in the evolution of security systems. Now, you can have the benefits of the "central station" system without the drawbacks. All you need is internet access and a web browser. With user friendly options, you will become proficient in all but the most complicated issues in a matter of minutes. You can login to the secure server from anywhere in the world, make the changes you need to make and within five minutes, those changes will have been implemented. It can even send text messages to your cell phone on selected "events," such as attempted entry by an unauthorized user to gain access, or loss of communication or power at your facility.

Impromptu schedule changes are a snap. If you decide to lock up early on the day before the long weekend, you

can accomplish that in less than five minutes. Should your janitorial service call to reschedule the day's cleaning, it is handled in five minutes. I can't speak for others, but a service we offer our clients is as a backup administrator. If they can't get to a computer, they can call us and we will handle it. The single most important benefit to the Web Hosted concept, to my way of thinking, is that for a reasonable monthly web access fee, the client also receives all standard new options and services. And it happens virtually automatically. For instance, in February of 2007 all of my customers received the "fix" for the new daylight savings time rules well before the new date arrived - at *no charge* to them and with no onsite service required. The new programming was automatically downloaded to the customer's controller on one of the normal communications with the host. Data security is assured with redundant servers and data backups without any action on the part of the customer.

As was the case in 1998, systems such as these must comply with local codes and be approved by the authority with jurisdiction. Life safety and building codes must be followed and proper plans, permitting, installation techniques and inspections must be maintained.

Choosing a provider of such a system should not be done without checking out the company's experience in the field, its references and, maybe most importantly, its ability to provide solutions not only for today, but also for the future.