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“Dollar General Unlocks Solution”

KEY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM SAVES RETAILER TIME, MONEY.

Runaway locksmith expenses are a reality for many chain stores. The combination of high employee turnover and lost keys can make key management not only expensive, but also time-consuming.

The scenario is a bit different, however, for Dollar General. The discount retailer utilizes an integrated key-tracking system that combines specially designed hardware with real-time record management via the Internet. It provides the chain with total key control in its 6,580 stores nationwide, allowing it to change locks without outside assistance and keep close tabs on its keys.

The program, InstaKey from InstaKey Lock Corp., Denver, gives Dollar General the capability to re-key a lock whenever needed, without the cost and delay of technical support or the need to remove a core from the door.

“With InstaKey, we have the ability to manage key-control activity in the stores ourselves. That, in turn, gives us the ability to save a lot of money, especially considering the high turnover rate in this business,” says Jerry Snider, asset protection director, Dollar General Corp., Goodlettsville, Tenn.

The manageability afforded by the system, at both the corporate and store level, is important, Snider says, especially in light of Dollar General’s aggressive expansion. The retailer is on track to open 650 units this year. The key-control system is in place throughout the chain. “InstaKey helps us manage our growth in an effective manner,” Snider says.

The hardware component of the program has eliminated re-keying costs and the need to remove cores from doors. It allows Dollar General to re-key a lock with a turn of the master key, without the services of a locksmith or any tools. The end-user inserts the key in the lock and turns the key according to directions.

“The beauty of the system is that it is so user-friendly,” Snider says. “It is easy to implement and easy to keep up on.”

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Because InstaKey's key blanks are exclusive and not available to locksmiths or hardware stores, keys cannot be duplicated. Every key has its own unique identification number to help in key tracking and key audits. **"Most keys can be duplicated, but not the ones from InstaKey,"** Snider explains.

The program's Web-based record-management system provides real-time tracking of every key, every key holder and every location. The information is accessible from any location at any time. Authorized users can also order new keys, change key holders and deal with lost keys via the system.

Using the record-management system, Dollar General's asset-protection coordinator authorizes and confirms orders that have been placed and tracks InstaKey deliveries. Each store's re-keying history, including dates and reasons given for the re-keying, is readily accessible. The coordinator can control the number of keys in circulation by approving orders from Dollar General store managers and viewing the reasons why they are ordering a new master key. "We order keys as we need them," Snider says. "We have a re-key set at the ready for each store."

Several months back, Dollar General undertook an extensive audit to review the locks, key numbers and re-key kits in all its stores. "It was quite an undertaking," Snider says. "But it gave us a good database going forward, as well as the comfort of knowing that everyone is on the program and exactly where everything is. As a new store opens up, we add that information to the database."

Dollar General implemented InstaKey approximately two years ago in hopes of reducing locksmith expenses. Snider says the annual savings have been significant.

"We reduced our annual key costs after converting numerous locations to the InstaKey system," he adds. **"The system paid for itself and increased store security in the process. The return on investment has been very good."**