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**Tech Trends Newsletter**

**Keyed up to manage facility access**

By Dave Wolkowitz

Employee turnover and dishonesty among those who have facility keys is a major hassle in the restaurant industry.

However, several companies have taken much of the sting out of managing access and tracking possession of keys. Denver-based lock system company InstaKey has developed lock hardware that enables the quick rekeying of locks by store management and a Web-based key management system that tracks exactly who has a specific, nonduplicable serialized InstaKey key. Security Solutions, a lock hardware company based in Mustang, Okla., has also developed a rekeyable lock, while security products and services firm LockNet has developed a Web-enabled key tracking system.

Chuck Tennenbaum, the director of operations for [Subway Development](#) of Columbus, Ohio, learned about InstaKey from a salesman claiming to have a lock system that anyone could rekey in a matter of seconds — without a locksmith.

"It didn't sound possible," Tennenbaum said. "Sure enough it was demonstrated, we installed it in a couple of stores, and that was all it took. Now it's in 100 locations."

Tennenbaum said Subway restaurants require lock changes up to three times per year, and he appreciates InstaKey's quick return on investment, fueled by a reduction in locksmith fees and hardware costs for such projects as installing new lock cylinders.

"We receive a return on our investment as soon as one use of the InstaKey system to rekey a lock," Tennenbaum said. "It might cost \$100 just to have a locksmith come out, then easily an extra \$80 per high-security lock to have it changed. And that doesn't even count more than an hour of time wasted when a supervisor has to meet a locksmith at the site."

Traditionally, entirely new locks or cylinders must be installed by locksmiths when trying to render useless existing keys in the possession of former employees or others who shouldn't have access to a facility. In contrast, InstaKey's system is unique in that its cylinders are reconfigurable by use of a special "step change" key that effectively deactivates old keys and reconfigures the cylinder to fit new keys. Management controls access to the "step-change keys" but anyone possessing it can reconfigure a lock simply by inserting the special key and turning it, which causes the pins in the lock's cylinder to change. Each cylinder can be reconfigured between four and 12 times before it has to be replaced. The number of times a cylinder can be reconfigured varies based on the use of master and submaster keys and several other factors. Though InstaKey system prices vary based on the scale of an operation, it may cost less than \$50 to reconfigure a lock and obtain several new keys. Initial installation of an InstaKey lock can cost approximately \$80, which is comparable with the cost of other high-security locks, according to company officials.

Doug Paquay, [Buffalo Wild Wings'](#) director of construction, agreed that Web-based key management systems provide a high return on investment.

"We used to pay a fortune to hire a locksmith to change out eight lock cylinders per location about every 18 months. Now managers just handle a step-change key," he said. "The system is very well thought-out. It's simple."

In the past, Minneapolis-based Buffalo Wild Wings faced a bill approaching \$600 each time cylinders in traditional locks had to be replaced, Paquay said. Since the installation of the new Web-based key management system, he said, it costs about \$10 for a step-change key to reconfigure the cylinder and about \$2.50 per new key, in addition to a minimal annual service fee. The 315-unit Buffalo Wild Wings retrofitted more than 15 locations with InstaKey and recouped its installation and reconfiguration costs within a year by reducing traditional locksmith and hardware costs, Paquay said.

Howard Dame, vice president of sales and marketing for LockNet, said InstaKey is generally highly cost-efficient for restaurants because of the frequency with which they must rekey, a measure sometimes mandated by chainwide policy. But Dame said InstaKey's benefits extend beyond hardware by facilitating the centralization of

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key management.

"There is no security policy that's any good if it's not actually implemented," he said. "Having a policy requiring lock change can potentially be an effective policy. But if management hasn't actually caused locks to change, the policy is meaningless. InstaKey makes rekeying easy, so it will get done."

Dame also said the technology enables customers to manage their own data with its Web-based key tracking and management system.

"It's challenging to manage the use and distribution of keys, so most companies have dealers do it for them. The problem is that some dealers and key manufacturers won't release clients' data if the client wants to end the relationship. They're effectively holding the client hostage," Dame said. "But InstaKey's Web-based system makes it easy for operators to gain control of their own data and switch lock providers if they choose to."

Web-based applications also allow management to track key distribution. Specific serialized keys can be tracked to particular employees. They also keep track of what type of key a user has, for instance, whether it is a master, submaster or a lock-up-only key that doesn't allow re-entry. According to Dame, the tracking takes much of the confusion out the key management process.

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