

Under Lock & Key

Tina Malloy

The benefits of key control for restaurant operations and security

With the business focus now placed on the customer experience, restaurant facility managers can be easily overwhelmed with defining and maintaining basic operational policies and procedures, such as managing who has keys.

Like many business marketplaces, restaurants have historically managed lock-and-key systems in a more reactive, as opposed to proactive, manner.

This is due to the fact that all lock-and-key systems are perceived to be the same and have the same set of limitations. This is true in most cases, absent a series of fundamental checks and balances within a key system solution, as well as a sound set of key control policies and procedures around it.

In such circumstances, unnecessary and expensive lock changes are frequently absorbed by restaurant facility budgets. A majority of these expenses, averaging more than \$400 per service call, are a result of management turnover. Many restaurant corporations even mandate lock changes up to three times per year, simply because there is no effective way to monitor the accuracy of the key system in place.

The threat of having duplicable keys in the hands of ex-employees, allowing access to the entire restaurant—including where food, liquor and money are kept—is a risk that cannot go ignored.

Unfortunately, in cases such as these, the only choice is to rekey the entire facility. This task is generally both time consuming and extremely expensive. However, for restaurant companies that invest in a key control program, much of the pain associated with keyed security is alleviated.

Identify the Right Solution

There is no one-size-fits-all key control program. Most key management solutions are customizable, so do a little research and ask some questions to find one that suits your security needs precisely. Consider factors such as square footage, number of locked doors and cabinets, how many keys and key holders, and who requires access to what. The complexity of the key control solution will depend on these elements, as well as the extent of layering with other security components within the restaurant.

It is also important to consider key system design (i.e., master keying) and whether you have the ability to eliminate unauthorized key duplication and to track keys individually. For example, many restaurants may use master key systems that provide single keyed access to all locks within the entire facility. Although this is a common practice liked for its efficiencies, it is important to remember the

associated security risks and expenses when one of these master keys is lost or stolen. Look to a key control program that is designed to manage these situations through improved key tracking and cost-effective rekey solutions.

Restrict Duplication and Track Keys

With the use of restricted, individually serialized keys, the threat of unauthorized key duplication is eliminated. Keys can be assigned and tracked to specific key holders and to the doors they open.

Tracking of serialized keys is accomplished with the use of key system records provided by the key system supplier. There are two ways records are typically supplied: on paper or digitally. Paper records are vulnerable to inaccuracies and may be illegible or lost. Most digital records, while better than paper, are also prone to errors and—if they are housed on one computer—are also at risk of going missing.

A solution that solves these challenges is a hosted, cloud-based platform that provides multiple authorized managers access to key system records from any web-enabled computer or tablet. A simple, cloudbased key-tracking module can dramatically reduce re-keying events and improve key-holder accountability and compliance, all while providing store management with better tools to monitor, measure and leverage procedural compliance and operational expenses.

Be Prepared with a Rekeyable Solution

Unfortunately, in fast-paced restaurant environments, keys can easily be misplaced, lost or stolen. High turnover is another major issue, so it's important to be prepared when these situations occur.

With a larger staff, many facilities must quickly weigh key security versus cost and convenience. It's highly likely keys will become lost or unaccounted for at some point or employees will quit without returning their keys. In such situations, the process of replacing all affected locks is expensive, disruptive and time-consuming. Instead of bringing in a locksmith or swapping cores, consider a solution with rekeyable locks that can be changed with the simple turn of a key, allowing security to be quickly restored.

Establish Policy and Procedure

Regardless of the key control system in place, make sure it is enforceable and measurable. Policies and procedures are meant to be implemented, reviewed and revised regularly to help tighten compliance.

For example, when issuing keys, establish and document which key holders receive which keys. One effective way is to use an authorized key holder listing and receipt sign off procedure. Similarly, if an employee is leaving the company, add a documented exit policy to get the key back. Also, make sure to publish who is authorized to order additional copies of keys, lock changes or service requests.

With these simple procedural additions, key control exceptions can be better managed at the restaurant level, providing audit regulate key quantities, help to manage who is holding them, provide key quantities, help to manage who is holding

them, provide publishable audit capabilities and measure lock changes or associated service request frequencies.

Consider Your Options and Act

A well-conceived key control program can help you eliminate unauthorized key duplication, accurately track keys to their assigned owners and to the doors they open, and immediately and cost effectively re-secure your restaurant facility in the event of a lost master key. Review your current key management situation and consider researching some options that could save you lots of time and aggravation.

Tina Molloy's career in the hospitality industry started in 1989. From her first job at Fuddruckers she knew the restaurant culture was a good match for her. Recently she earned her level two sommelier certificate. She has been with InstaKey Security Systems since June 2015.