KEYTRAK®

MULTIFAMILY



ARE SMART LOCKS A SMART MOVE FOR YOUR MULTIFAMILY PROPERTY?

More and more people are choosing to live a connected lifestyle. In 2023, 48% of households bought at least one connected device, and 16% purchased three or more.[1]

Considering the widespread adoption of smart technology, you might be considering trading your property's traditional locks for smart locks (also called electronic locks or keyless entry). Before implementing such a system, however, use the questions in this whitepaper to help you decide if smart locks are a smart move for your apartment community.

What Do Your Residents Think About Smart Technology?

It's easy to assume residents want connected homes. In many cases, you'd be right: The National Apartment Association (NAA) found that around 58% of residents believe smart homes are beneficial. Of those who don't have smart-home technology, 84% would like to see features implemented in their communities.[2] Millennials in particular gravitate toward digital locks, with 60% saying they'd be more likely to live somewhere that offers mobile access control.[3]

Residents who prefer smart locks like the unique benefits they provide:

- No need to keep up with keys (assuming the system uses a keypad or smartphone — others still require users to keep up with a fob or card).
- Option to grant friends and family access to their home digitally.
- Ability to reset the lock remotely in lockout situations.

> **"The last thing you want is for residents to feel like you're forcing smart locks on them."**

But what about those who *don't* want connected homes?

In its State of the Connected World 2023 report, The World Economic Forum reports that 82% of respondents lacked confidence that users of connected devices and related technologies are protected against the unethical and irresponsible use of the technology.[4]

For example, a group of residents in New York sued their landlords for the right to use physical keys. They were uncomfortable with the building's new smart lock system, which required a smartphone app to enter.

One of the plaintiffs, who is in his 90s, had trouble using a phone and said he was trapped in his own home as a result. In addition, he and the other plaintiffs worried that the app violated people's privacy by tracking location data.[5]

> **73% of security professionals say they wouldn't use smart locks to protect their own homes.**

Before moving forward with keyless entry — or any smart technology — make sure you know your target market. Do they view the solution as an amenity or a violation of privacy? The last thing you want is for residents to feel like you're forcing smart locks on them.

How Will You Ensure Residents' Security and Privacy?

Whether your residents are enthusiastic advocates or reluctant adopters of smart locks, assure them that you've implemented measures to ensure their security and privacy.

Smart locks can be vulnerable to hackers since manufacturers often use security protocol that's not as secure as it could be to prioritize ease of use.[6] Some locks can even be hacked by someone with minimal tech skills.[7] That's why 73% of security professionals say they wouldn't use smart locks to protect their own homes.[8]

To put residents at ease, share with them the security precautions you're taking to keep them safe (without exposing too many specifics). Some examples include:

- Creating an automatic audit trail of who accesses each apartment, when, and why.
- Notifying residents when someone is granted access to their apartment, whether via key or electronic lock.
- Following cybersecurity best practices for any internet-connected devices you provide.
- Giving residents practical tips on how to protect themselves.

Even if you decide not to install smart locks, these tips are essential to a reliable apartment security plan.

> **Most of the time, it makes sense to use the same technology at multiple properties.**

Do You Have Other Properties Using Smart Locks?

Think about the key control methods you're using at other properties. How many use smart locks? What works well and what doesn't? How easy would it be to roll out the access control solution you're considering at other communities in the future?

Most of the time, it makes sense to use the same technology at multiple properties for a few reasons:

- Employee training can be standardized.
- Reporting is in the same format, allowing you to get an accurate high-level view of activity across properties.
- Purchasing and vendor management are easier.

Of course, as mentioned before, it's important to bear your target market in mind. If residents prefer traditional keys, don't install smart locks simply because other properties use them.

Does the Solution You're Considering Add Value?

Find out if the smart lock system you're looking at includes features or applications that help you save time and get more value from your purchase. Some communities, for example, use keyless entry to offer prospects self-guided tours.

With on-site personnel facing time constraints and the pressure to do more with less, a solution that multitasks is a plus. Just ensure that it actually provides a benefit rather than increasing the workload (more on that later).

To figure out what you want out of a technology investment, evaluate your staff's daily tasks and the capabilities of software you have in place already.

> **While smart locks might make residents' lives easier, that's not always the case for leasing offices.**

Does Your Staff Have the Resources Required to Properly Manage the System?

While smart locks might make residents' lives easier, that's not always the case for leasing offices. As with any technology, there are two issues that can make or break a successful implementation: time and training.

Time

Electronic locks come with the time-consuming task of programming fobs, cards, access codes, or biometric fingerprints. The locks need to be reprogrammed not only when a resident moves in or out, but also when they've been compromised, such as by hacking or someone losing a fob. Depending on the size of the property, managing access rights could be a full-time job.

If the system uses physical access tokens such as fobs or cards, you may be tempted to create master versions of the tokens instead of programming a spare token every time an employee needs to access a unit.

While the lock logs will show *when* someone accesses a unit, they won't show *who* accessed it or *why*. This method is only helpful for investigating incidents — not so much for preventing breaches.

To cut down on programming time while ensuring security and employee accountability, you can preprogram a token for each unit. You should then store the tokens in a secure location such as an electronic key control system. That way, staff members can quickly access the apartment they need. Since they're required to check out a fob or card, you'll be able to see who used each token and when. Some systems will also alert you if the tokens aren't returned on time.

Training

Your employees can have all the time in the world, but if they don't get the training they need, they're not going to follow processes and procedures.

With multifamily turnover rates hovering around 33% as of 2019 (the latest data available from the NAA),[9] an efficient training process is a must if you're constantly onboarding new employees.

> It's a common misconception that smart locks eliminate the need for a key control policy.

How Will You Manage Keys?

It's a common misconception that smart locks eliminate the need for a key control policy. But you likely still have one or more of the following types of keys to manage:

Backup Keys

Although there are some smart locks that don't require traditional keys, many have key slots in case the lock malfunctions.

Miscellaneous Keys

Chances are, you have keys for other areas on the property, such as storage sheds, utility closets, or offices.

Access Tokens

Access tokens such as fobs and cards serve the same purpose metal keys do. As such, you should treat them with the same level of security.

Take the time to inventory all the keys your property will still have after implementing a keyless entry system. Then, decide how you'll secure and track them. The most inexpensive option upfront is a pegboard combined with a manually updated logbook or spreadsheet. An electronic key control system, however, is more secure and captures a digital record of who's accessed keys.

Making Your Decision

Without a doubt, smart technology will become commonplace over the next several years. Be thoughtful in how you decide what technology to implement. When it comes to smart locks, it's important to factor in how they'll affect resident satisfaction, property maintenance, and security.

Also remember that just because you have a smart lock system doesn't necessarily eliminate the need for a key control policy. To see how KeyTrak systems can help you keep keys secure while improving your property's efficiency, visit **keytrak.com/multifamily**.

[1] Deloitte
[2] NAA
[3] Allegion
[4] World Economic Forum
[5] Engadet
[6] Dark Reading
[7] Security Affairs
[8] Forbes
[9] NAA

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