



The Right Key Management Solution Is More Important Than You Think

BY BILL GAUL, FIELD MANAGER FOR KEYTRAK, 800.719.8534, KEYTRAK.COM

From marketing to leasing to hiring, a lot goes into running a multifamily property. These things are important, of course, but there is one often-neglected aspect of your operations that could cause a negative trickle-down effect for your whole property: key control.

If you don't have good processes, your employees won't want to stick around. If a leasing consultant can't quickly find the key to a specific apartment, they can't show it to prospective residents. If you have residents leaving reviews complaining about your apartment community's poor key security practices, your marketing efforts will suffer.

To provide a good experience for your residents, help your employees excel at their jobs, and protect your property's reputation, choosing an effective key and access control solution should be a top priority.

There are dozens of options to consider, but the most common methods you'll encounter are pegboards with a physical logbook for tracking key use, electronic key control systems, and smart locks. To select the best option for your property, consider the following criteria.

Residents' Preferences

Make sure you know your residents and put yourself in their shoes: What key management method would they feel most comfortable with?



For example, according to lock manufacturer Schlage and Wakefield Research, 86 percent of millennials are willing to pay more for an apartment with smart locks.

Other demographics, however, might be strongly opposed to keyless entry. In a story reported by CNET, a group of residents in New York went so far as to sue their landlord for the right to use traditional metal keys after a smart lock system was installed in the building. The system required users to download a smartphone application to enter the building, which the residents feared would track their activities or prevent them from entering the building if they had difficulty using the app.

Whether or not you use a smart lock system or physical keys, it's important to control access to residents' homes and capture a digital record of who's removed a key or entered a specific unit. Smart lock systems and electronic key control systems are the clear winners in this regard — methods that require manually entering transaction details into a logbook or spreadsheet are prone to inaccuracy.

Brand Compatibility

Have you ever considered how your key management method reflects your brand? If you're advertising your property as a smart community, it would make sense to have smart locks on your doors. Or, if you're an upscale community, you'd want to avoid methods that are perceived as cheap or insecure, such as storing keys on a pegboard and labeling them with paper tags.

For most properties, a safe bet is to use a key and access control system that has features like automatically recording when keys are removed and notifying the resident by text or email when someone has removed the key to their home.

Scalability

The vendor management principle of consolidation is an effective way to reduce costs, streamline processes, standardize

reporting, and enforce consistent standards. That goes for key management partners as well — working with a single key or access control technology provider across several communities is a smart move.

After vetting potential solutions and providers, partnering with one vendor takes the guesswork out of rolling out a key management solution at properties in the future. It's important to remember, though, that every property is unique and, as I mentioned earlier, you have to consider your target market. For example, just because smart locks work for one property doesn't mean they'll be a good fit for another one.

Versatility

Whenever you implement a new solution or process, it's helpful to consider how it'll work alongside other processes. It goes without saying that you don't want a new solution to interfere with existing tasks. Ideally, it'll even make other processes more efficient. Think about whether a system includes additional features or applications that can help you save time and get more value from your purchase.

For example, using an electronic key control system works well with other property management workflows by allowing leasing consultants and maintenance technicians to get keys for tours and work orders quickly. Depending on the system, it can even help improve processes not involving keys, such as managing employee work schedules through a time clock feature or helping with an influx of packages with a package tracking feature.

If a community has a keyless entry system, you could offer prospects self-guided tours (granted, this isn't for everyone).

Using a manual pegboard-based process for storing keys is the least versatile. It might fit into your existing routines, but there's the risk that it'll make your employees less

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Proactive Management of Criminal Activity in Multi-Housing

BY STACY EKHOLM, SENIOR PORTFOLIO DIRECTOR; TRAVIS GUZA, DIRECTOR OF IT AND LISA MOE

STUARTCO

We are all facing unwanted traffic, minor and in some cases major criminal activity on our properties. We want to protect our properties but more importantly to protect our residents and our employees at all costs. Over the years, our team at StuartCo has developed some fundamental steps to follow. Our process includes working with the on-site team, regional director and our IT Team to have a comprehensive approach.

Opportunities to keep informed and engaged with little to no cost:

- Be aware of criminal activity in the neighborhood; connect with your police department and become friendly with the patrol.
- Be active in Crime Free events in your community. Work with your neighbors to maintain open communication.

- Resident communication and participation is vital. Your resident(s) need to be part of the work to keep your community safe. Reporting concerns to you and/or the police. Ensuring locked doors and no one access the property that does not belong.
- Establish and maintain a good key system that you audit and ensure is safe and controlled.
- Limit master keys or eliminate if possible.
- Office Alarm Systems are important to protect your equipment and confidential information. Work with your software platform to save documents to the computer/cloud vs. paper files that can be lost or stolen.
- Conduct Security Survey's/Audits of your property (properties) during all seasons. Lights need to adjust as the daytime adjusts.

- Maintain landscaping. Keep bushes and shrubs trimmed away from blocking windows.
- Use and enforcement of crime free/drug free addendum's.
- Participate in Nite to Unite (formerly National Night Out)
- Regular checks of garage door timers, door closures, etc.

Opportunities to invest in safe improvements for your property:

- Add Charlie bars or additional locking mechanisms on patio doors and windows.
- Use of anti-pry plates on exterior doors to minimize break-in's.
- Consider well placed cameras with continuance recording. Cameras should be placed at entrance or exits to buildings including lobbies, garage levels, common area spaces.
- FOB systems are a great investment – even for your exterior doors and garage doors. Allows you to know who is accessing your property. Also if a FOB is lost and reported, you can easily delete one FOB.
- Concierge services or staffing at your main entrance. Or consider a courtesy patrol to check your property during the night hours.
- Increased lighting around parking lots, garage entrances and walking areas. Good idea for overall safety but also may prevent unwanted traffic.
- Upgrade lighting to LED – brighter and longer life.
- One Call Now or a Resident Notification System to allow you to communicate concerns with your residents. ■

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efficient — especially if a key goes missing and the log wasn't updated accurately. It certainly won't improve any other processes, like package tracking.

Staff Training and Support

According to data from CEL & Associates, Inc., the employee turnover rate in the multifamily industry has consistently been 30 percent on average each year since 2011. This means you'll be frequently training new employees, and an efficient training process is a must.

If you use a technology-based solution for managing access to apartments, having a technology partner that offers customized

training services can help alleviate the training burden. While the vendor trains users how to use their systems, you can focus on helping your new team members hone job-based skills.

When operating a multifamily community, the pressure to do more with less can quickly occupy your time and attention. It's easy to push certain responsibilities, like key control, to the backburner. However, key control isn't just about keys — it affects multiple areas of your operation. Spend the time to develop an effective key control solution, and you'll reap the rewards. ■

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