

# THE DIGITAL VISITOR

A blurred person in a dark suit is walking from left to right across a polished, reflective floor in a modern office hallway. The background features a large wall of light blue-grey panels and a prominent entrance with a bright orange frame and glass doors. The overall atmosphere is clean, professional, and dynamic.

NEW RESEARCH SHOWS THE EVOLUTION OF  
VISITOR MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

BY CAROLIN WOLF





**K**nock, knock! It's 2017, and the way companies answer the door is changing. In an increasingly dynamic and digital work environment, facilities around the world are rethinking how to welcome and manage visitors. Why the shift from paper logs and ink pens? Think about the opportunity and risk each visitor embodies. Every person entering a lobby or attending an event could compromise the integrity of the business and expose property owners to unforeseen risk. Who knows who's walking through the door? How does a facility ensure businesses understand and remember each visitor? Whether they are a customer, prospect or partner, the right visitor management system enriches business knowledge, shapes impressions, enhances safety and can even grow relationships.

Visitor management software, or VMS, enables a facility to evolve their visitor management processes. A 2017 VMS research study surveyed key stakeholders to identify trends and evaluate the impact of technology on visitor management. The survey was designed for professionals with an interest in operations, security and IT. Respondents spanned all industries, company sizes and geographies.

#### **THE BACKSTORY**

Hosting visitors has always been an element of conducting business. Historically, companies formalized a visit by asking individuals to make a record in a lobby book. While the rest of the business world went digital, for a long time surprisingly little changed in the process of welcoming and managing visitors.

The reasons for this were manifold. Often it was not clear who owned the responsibility, with an overlap of operations, facility management and IT. Differences in processes and requirements across multiple company locations made it difficult to introduce a unified system. The few existing on-premise technology solutions were expensive to implement and departments did not have a dedicated budget for this kind of initiative.

These obstacles led VMS to migrate to the cloud, becoming known as Software as a Service, or SaaS. In a cloud-based SaaS, a software licensing model is used where a visitor management application is hosted by a third-party provider who makes it available to customers over the internet. This represented a major upgrade from pen and paper systems.

#### **THE EVOLUTION**

In recent years, progressive companies took this idea a step further and recognized the opportunity available in collecting visitor data, as well as the risks of sticking with the status quo. In fact, 78 percent of survey respondents consider the importance of visitor management at seven or higher, on a scale from one to 10. A new category of cloud-based VMS was born.

This new generation of VMS replaces the paper log book at the front desk and allows

guests to sign-in on a device, such as an iPad. It offers a centralized digital record of who has visited and eases the process upon arrival by adapting the digital experience for each visitor type.

Features of next-gen VMS include customizable questions, automated notifications, photo capture and instant badge printing with optional screening against watch lists. While there are several on-premise systems that can be implemented, they can be expensive to launch and maintain and require servers and continuous software updates. These costs are amplified when managing multiple sites. A cloud-based VMS consolidates visitor data in one platform which can be accessed by authorized personnel from any location. Deployment is faster and more cost-effective than a facility-based solution, which offers organizations the opportunity for greater flexibility, efficiency and security.

### THE IMPACT

To address longstanding challenges, the digital VMS space has seen rapid adoption in the past year. The introduction of visitor management software has had a wide impact on organizations and the people involved. It simplifies the administrator's job, reduces the employee's stress of hosting and creates a positive experience for visitors.

Results from the research study show that a VMS significantly enhances four key areas of a business: efficiency, security, data and brand image.

## EFFICIENCY

82  
%

OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS CONFIRM THAT **OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY HAS INCREASED** WITH THE USE OF A VMS

Checking people in can be a time-consuming task for administrators. Depending on business requirements, this can include capturing personal details, safety briefings, printing badges, review of legal documents and notifying hosts of their visitor's arrival. For most companies, this quickly adds up to five minutes per person, distracting your staff from attending to other value-adding projects. With the introduction of a self sign-in system, 84 percent of respondents believe it has made their job easier and a third indicate a reduction in check-in time of more than 40 percent.

Large enterprises are faced with the complexities of managing multiple facilities in various locations. This can be simplified by using a cloud-based platform that can be accessed anytime and from any device. Administrators can easily design and tailor the visitor experience to adapt to site-specific requirements.

With a VMS, employees are empowered to host their visitors more effectively. With a unified system, appropriate registration and identification is simplified. Hosts can pre-register their guests by accessing the platform from any device. To smooth the process, employees can include important information in the invite such as parking instructions or Wi-Fi log-in details. With automatic arrival notifications, no time is wasted in informing relevant people internally.

Even the visitor will save time. Going digital makes it possible to remember information that was previously entered, reducing the effort for future visits. A visitor can also be sent a QR code prior to the meeting that automatically populates his details when scanning upon arrival. This becomes particularly relevant at high-volume entrances or events.

## SAFETY AND SECURITY

82  
%

OF THOSE SURVEYED REPORT THAT **A VMS CREATES A SAFER WORKING ENVIRONMENT**

Data and physical security have become increasingly important. Global news regularly reports data breaches, terror attacks, unexpected public incidents and other threats that organizations must now protect against. In fact, 47 percent of survey respondents perceive an increase in security risks that call for greater sophistication in how physical locations are managed.

As part of facility management, there are local and state safety regulations, including training, facility inspections and security of the premises. Do you know who enters your facilities? Are you able to ensure data integrity? Have you considered visitors in your emergency response plan? The scope is significant and the consequences of incidents can be detrimental. Thankfully, technology is advancing quickly to bridge the gap between risk and reality.

Starting with the basic requirements of visual identification, a VMS can capture ID cards, automatically take photos and print badges. Going beyond visitor recognition, it is important to differentiate between wanted and unwanted guests. In the past, there was no easy option for a real-time background check. Visitors were generally asked to sign in with pen and paper, which did not allow for a historical view of

individuals. Manual watchlists are tedious and often inaccurate, which limits their use and effectiveness. To protect data and people, an advanced cloud-based VMS will offer integrations with third-party watchlists. At check-in, visitors can be screened against existing or customized databases to instantly identify risk and automatically notify security personnel.

Beyond the risks of security, there is also the need to ensure general safety. To prepare for emergencies, most businesses train their employees on evacuation procedures. Too often, visitors are forgotten in the emergency response plan. Safety communication with contractors and guests has always been challenging based on the irregular interaction with these groups. By incorporating safety training videos during the iPad check-in, or including an emergency exit map in the visitor notifications, important information is passed on effectively. In actual emergencies, the team will have instant access to the cloud-based guest book from any browser, and they're able to switch to a roll-call view that can send alerts for evacuation to those still present onsite.

## DATA AND ANALYTICS

84  
%

OF RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THE MOVE TO A DIGITAL CHECK-IN SYSTEM HAS PROVIDED VALUABLE DATA INSIGHTS

With a digital log book, there is a live record of people entering any site. There are detailed views of individuals, including any personal details entered and dates of historical visits. With this holistic data, companies better understand guests and identify any patterns across the organization.

An advanced VMS also offers integration with customer relationship management systems, or CRMs, such as Salesforce. By matching the data from your visitor sign-in experience to your central platform, you can provide useful insights to your sales, marketing or services teams by enriching your leads, contacts, campaigns or other relevant business information. For example, visitor data could inform the assessment of investing in an executive briefing center by linking it to sales. What is the value of your visitors?

Many companies also face stringent audit and compliance requirements that ask for detailed records on who has been entering the site. Technology allows companies to become more transparent and reduce the time spent on creating accurate reports.

As many companies nowadays have a large global footprint, being able to easily capture information across multiple sites and make it accessible to selected stakeholders, has become a big advantage of cloud-based solutions.

## BRAND IMPACT

53  
%

OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS PROVIDED FEEDBACK THAT THEY WERE IMPRESSED WHEN GREETED THROUGH A VMS

A significant intangible benefit of a VMS is the impact it has on brand image. Does the visitor sign-in experience match the investment placed in the beautiful lobby? Visitors are a company's future. Every person hosted represents an opportunity, and it is important to make a good impression. With a VMS, customized sign-in journeys can be designed and tailored to fit each visitor type, allowing FMs and occupants to enhance the experience and only ask appropriate questions. Jeff Bohlen, office services manager at Mountain Equipment Coop, says of their VMS, "With new technology in our lobby, we are seen as a progressive company."

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Effective facility management relies on removing barriers and enabling a business to operate reliably and safely. Implementing a VMS represents a significant step toward simplification, creating a better experience for visitors and their hosts. Roughly 76 percent of the professionals surveyed say they are now able to more closely focus on personal interaction with their guests, which positively impacts the relationships that are formed. Administrative tasks are reduced, security is increased and more data is available, which provides companies a deeper understanding of who their visitors are.

It's time to drive innovation in visitor management by recognizing and adopting the benefits of VMS — prepare for that next knock on the door. **FMJ**

## RESOURCE

1. The Evolution of Visitor Management: A Traction Guest Visitor Management Survey



**CAROLIN WOLF**,  
Product Marketing Manager at

Traction Guest, has shaped business and brand strategies for large enterprises and smaller ventures, with a focus on the tech sector. Her survey revealed key insights and cemented the power of data to innovate and drive continuous improvement.