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Securing The OC

Orange County secures more than 60 facilities with access control solutions

By Del V. Salvi

LIKE most government agencies across the country, Orange County, Calif., has placed increasing emphasis on the security of its employees and its buildings in recent years. The ability to grant or deny building access and monitor traffic flow in and out of more than 60 facilities truly is a challenge -- especially when combined with today's state of world events.

The county's buildings are all networked to the division's main office in Santa Ana for centralized programming, control and monitoring via LAN/WAN. More than 30,000 users are currently enrolled in the system. The relationship between Checkpoint Systems Inc. and the Internal Services/Facilities Operations Division of Orange County dates back to 1986. That's when the county chose the company to implement card-activated access control on a single door with 400 users. During the past 18 years, the number of Orange County's municipal facilities has continued to grow, along with the number of employees and visitors frequenting these locations.

Today, Orange County is in the process of upgrading from Checkpoint's ThresholdEnterprise access control system - which has served the county's Internal Services/Facilities Operations Division with more than 1,800 readers spread across all facilities -- to its new Pinnacle Plus. The county's buildings are all networked to the division's main office in Santa Ana for centralized programming, control and monitoring via LAN/WAN. More than 30,000 users are currently enrolled in the system.

In the Beginning

The Services/Facilities Operations Division of Orange County has been overseeing the evolution of the county's access control system project since its inception. When the project first started, management's objective was to save money on re-keying buildings by employing some form of card access that could be used by all agencies and departments.

The division sent out 35 invitations to bid on the project with a list of system requirements including networking ability, which was via modem at that time. They also wanted an access control system that could be installed and serviced by the county's staff, along with other parameters such as warranty support, training of county staff and support from the selected manufacturer for further expansion.

Orange County made its final selection based on the predetermined criteria and discussions they conducted with other facilities that were already using ThresholdEnterprise access control system. Additionally, ThresholdEnterprise was designed for advanced security management applications. Its expandability made it a logical choice for Orange County's Services/Facilities Operations Division, given the growth rate of the county's access control system.

The access control system has run smoothly since day one for the division -- even with all the system upgrades and expansions over the years. Now, the county is in the process of changing all of its magnetic-stripe readers to proximity readers in order to eliminate the need to replace worn readers. It's the modern equivalent of eliminating the physical contact that used to deteriorate keys and locks with repeated use.

Orange County has a multifaceted staff that has been actively involved in all aspects of the access control system's evolution to date. The staff has worked with the software for many years, to the point that staff in the control center can be instructed over the telephone to initiate program changes. Their knowledge of the system also makes it easy to communicate with Checkpoint's technical services.

Looking to Expand

Orange County's Services/Facilities Operations Division's staff is always exploring new ways to use the access control system to solve a wide array of security needs. One of the areas where the system has proved highly effective is in law enforcement -- in evidence rooms, refrigerators and freezers, and in various laboratories. The county staff also has used the system for emergency lockdowns and lockouts in specific buildings when needed.

The county recently completed upgrading all its access control operations to ThresholdEnterprise and are in the process of upgrading to the latest version of Pinnacle. After running a beta system test site, the division realized that Pinnacle delivers new capabilities to further improve the county's ability to manage its access control network.

Pinnacle elevates access control to a new plateau by offering clients like Orange County more precise control, greater flexibility and enhanced security for multiple facilities with different systems criteria. It builds on the flexibility and scalability of ThresholdEnterprise with an intuitive user interface that is user-friendly and adds feature-rich hardware and software packages.

Pinnacle, integrated with Checkpoint's modular controllers, also offers an expanded library of features that includes a versatile scalability, unlimited expandability for ongoing growth, wide-ranging administrative options and compatibility with leading third-party solutions.

In Orange County, Pinnacle will help manage building access from a central point and will minimize onsite troubleshooting constrained by distance and traffic. At the same time, each agency requires some security autonomy. For example, each county agency wants its building's cards to carry a particular logo and graphics, and a significant number of the county's employees need fast access to more than one building. There may be times, for example, when emergency response requires county sheriffs to get into a health care center without delay.

Pinnacle's range of extended features thus proved very attractive. These features included security system administration and control with the power to set up multiple passwords and permissions per user, simultaneous monitoring of separately defined regions, SQL database management and system partitioning, extensive report options, DVR and CCTV integration with mapping, and a powerful software development tool (SDK) to take advantage of Pinnacle's open architecture for customization and advanced integration.

Providing the Necessary Support

Checkpoint has provided the staff at Orange County with training in both field system support and computer programming so they can proceed with the upgrade to Pinnacle. New facilities being integrated into the system are installed by authorized dealers in the Orange County area. One of the elements that has helped perpetuate the company's relationship with Orange County is the company's technical support and willingness to work to help solve end user problems in the field.

Orange County's need for a high level of customization and labor-efficient solutions makes it quite a demanding customer. In response, Checkpoint's sales network has delivered great support to Orange County. It's one of the reasons why the county's access control system has grown so large and Checkpoint Systems has solidified a long-standing relationship with it over the years.

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