



# **12 Questions to Ask Your Access Control Provider**

## 12 Questions to Ask Your Access Control Provider

- i. Do you design and manufacture your own products?
- ii. Where are your products manufactured?
- iii. How long have you been in business? (And why does it matter?)
- iv. How well do you manage your supply chain to ensure product availability?
- v. Does your market focus align with my company's needs?
- vi. Do you have well-developed channels and distribution?
- vii. Do you facilitate integration with video, intrusion and/or fire systems?
- viii. Do you provide scalability to keep up with system growth?
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## Here is what you need to ask your Access Control Provider

There is more to choosing an access control system than comparing specs and product features. Another useful approach is to consider the company behind the technology. Getting to know the manufacturer that supplies and supports an access control system imparts added confidence in the company behind the system. Asking the right questions promotes dialogue and uncovers a wealth of information and insight about any access control manufacturer. Let's consider a dozen questions that provide a good place to begin the conversation.

### *1. Do you design and manufacture your own products?*

Some access control manufacturers provide both hardware and software for their systems, while others provide software only and incorporate third-party hardware components, such as controllers, into the system. There are advantages of companies providing all the system components, creating a “one-stop” shop. For example, deploying software and hardware that are purpose-built for a specific system ensures that the components work together because they were designed *as* a single entity (system). The software is fine-tuned to the specific needs of the hardware, and vice versa. When using generic or third-party hardware, on the other hand, the system depends on how well the components work together, given that they were designed by different companies. There is also an economic advantage for an access control company to provide both hardware and software: Both components are sources of revenue to the company. If a manufacturer uses hardware from an outside vendor, additional per-door software fees may be added to help recoup costs of designing the system and to provide a reasonable profit. If a single vendor provides both hardware and software, there are more ways to generate revenue among software and hardware pricing without having to create additional fees and licensing charges. The resulting system provides greater overall value which can be passed on to the customer. In either case, a customer would pay a small fee to upgrade to a newer version of the software.

Asking the right questions promotes dialogue and uncovers a wealth of information and insight about any access control manufacture. Despite their big promises and claims of disruption, new companies may lack a thorough understanding of customer needs that is hard-earned over decades of serving the market.

### *2. Where are your products manufactured?*

In the global economy, system components are manufactured all over the world. Overseas manufacturing provides opportunities to lower overall costs, but is there a downside for customers? Does lowering costs by manufacturing overseas require a compromise in quality? Do access control companies have less control, given that outsourced manufacturing does not involve company employees? Is there a longer lag time when tweaking product designs or responding to rapid changes in the market?

When manufacturing takes place in close proximity to product research and development (R&D), sales, and the company's headquarters, all the elements can work together more closely. Localized manufacturing also reduces lead times and can eliminate concerns about supply chain disruption. Greater agility allows the manufacturer to respond quickly to changes in the market, and for design and manufacturing decisions to be made in tandem and without delay.

### *3. How long have you been in business? (And why does it matter?)*

Access control is suddenly a "hot" market, and new companies are coming into the fold every year. New entries often promise disruption and new approaches to old problems. However, there is also value in a company that has been in the access control business for decades. For one thing, a company with more longevity has more expertise and a deeper understanding of the market and of customer needs. For some new companies, access control may be an afterthought or an add-on to a larger IT system. Despite their big promises and claims of

disruption, they may lack a thorough understanding of customer needs that is hard-earned over decades of serving the market. Obviously, the market has changed in the last 25 years, and legacy companies continue to thrive only by responding to market changes and updating their offerings to today's needs. Another lesson that successful long-term companies learn is that they can't leave customers behind but must enable even older systems to continue operating while adapting to changing needs. Access control companies with longevity have learned the importance of providing solutions, not just products.

*4. How well do you manage your supply chain to ensure product availability?*

Supply chain disruption is a relatively new consideration in the access control arena, but one that must be carefully managed to minimize impact on customers. As we have seen, domestic manufacturing can help manage the uncertainties of the supply chain, even while providing needed flexibility to respond to shortages in the market. For example, if one computer chip is in short supply, a localized manufacturer is in a better position to respond by switching out a new component, given that research and development is located near the manufacturing facility and can work together more closely. Managing supply chain may also include stocking up and keeping needed components on hand to serve customer needs. In short, flexibility is central to managing supply chain difficulties and minimizing impact on the customer.

*5. Does your market focus align with my company's needs?*

If a small- to medium-sized business (SMB) needs an access control system, doesn't it make sense they should buy a system from a company that specializes in SMB systems? Some companies offer a full range of systems that can serve anywhere from the largest enterprise customers to the smallest one-door systems. However, a company that specializes in a certain size and type system is best equipped to serve the needs of a customer that needs that specific system. A company that specializes in larger enterprise systems might be able to serve a smaller customer, but the system size and type might be "overkill" for the more modest needs of an SMB customer. It might be more expensive because it offers extra bells

and whistles not needed by a smaller customer. It might require a more expensive server, or even require more skilled technicians because it is more complicated to install and maintain.

Most access control manufacturers offer some level of integration with other technologies such as video and intrusion; however, the “level” of integration varies widely.

*6. Do you have well-developed channels and distribution?*

An access control manufacturer can ensure easy and immediate access to its product line if it sells through distribution. Distributors specialize in maximizing availability of products in large or small quantities, in local distribution centers that are convenient and avoid shipping charges. Distributors can keep more inventory on hand. Distributors have qualified sales personnel who know their products and can answer any questions. Buying from access control manufacturers who do not sell through distribution can add delays and costs for integrators who might have to wait for equipment to be shipped overnight from the manufacturer. Furthermore, during a chip shortage, distributors often have higher stock levels which positions them to best mitigate the impact a shortage can cause.

*7. Do you facilitate integration with video, intrusion and/or fire systems?*

Integration with other systems ensures availability of a “seamless” solution. Most access control manufacturers offer some level of integration with other technologies such as video and intrusion; however, the “level” of integration varies widely. Two different companies working together to integrate a system might be competitors; the partnership would certainly not be exclusive. One manufacturer might seek to integrate with 50 or more video systems, which begs the question of how well integrated they can be with such a variety of other options. Often, the best “solution” comes from tight integration provided by access control technology that is part of a larger security ecosystem. Tight integration means video is available immediately related to any access control or intrusion event, all viewable on a smartphone app using a single log-in. Sister divisions that share the same corporate parent

are much more likely to work together to keep integrations up-to-date and functioning at the highest level.

*8. Do you provide scalability to keep up with system growth?*

As multiple smaller systems evolve, a scalable approach can tie them together seamlessly using software.

As companies grow, their access control needs change. A smaller customer might need only a one-door or four-door system at first but might need to add systems in new locations over time. As multiple smaller systems evolve, a scalable approach can tie them together seamlessly using software. As the systems grow, they operate as a single larger system that evolves to serve the changing needs of the company. New features like a web connection or smartphone app add functionality.

*9. What is your record of technical support?*

Technical support is critical. A company that focuses on a single system can provide a deeper level of technical support and doesn't have to spread their attention across multiple systems and product lines. Technical support is provided at multiple levels, from Tier 1 (most calls), to Tier 2 for deeper troubleshooting, and Tier 3 for resolving advanced, dedicated issues. With the customer's permission, tech support personnel can log into systems remotely to streamline troubleshooting. Dealers are trained/certified to ensure they are knowledgeable when interfacing with technical support. When technical support is in the same building as R&D and product management, there are clear lines of communication when dealing with customer challenges. Tech support personnel should not have quotas or time limits, which can interfere with providing the highest level of technical support. Emphasis should be on quality over quantity.

*10. Are you advocates for transitioning to the cloud?*

Cloud systems are especially scalable because there is less equipment to install, and cloud configurations are ultimately adaptable to the exact needs of a company. Although cloud systems are a relatively recent focus for access control, some companies have been promoting the cloud for a decade or longer. For example, Crystal Technologies Limited hosted and managed access control cloud offering has been functioning for more than 10 years, and all Crystal Tech controllers are supported in the cloud. Older controllers are equipped with encrypted, secure IP adapters that enable them to connect through the cloud. Cloud systems are especially attractive to the SMB market.

*11. Which new technologies do you embrace?*

The access control world is changing with a wave of newer technologies that expand system functionality. There are new readers that offer WiFi and Bluetooth connectivity. Wireless locks, controllers and other systems can now be easily integrated, which saves money in less cabling. New credentialing options, such as smart phones and biometrics, are expanding customer choices, accelerated in the short term by supply shortages in chips and cards. New mobile apps can be downloaded from the Apple Store and/or Google Play to expand the ability of customers to interface with systems, and web-based client software provides additional functionality to control and configure a system.

*12. How strong are you on cybersecurity?*

Cybersecurity is more important than ever in the access control world. It's easy today to clone a prox card using a gadget openly available on the internet. Newer smart cards are encrypted, but that's just part of the ongoing challenge of keeping networks secure. Different companies emphasize a culture of cyber resilience and dedicated support. Cybersecurity is a consistent organization-wide focus, driven by standards-based. Crystal Technologies Limited cybersecurity team emphasizes speed, transparency and professionalism, monitoring trends,





assessing new threats and providing guidance on handling vulnerabilities and reducing exposure. Customers can rest assured all the cybersecurity bases are covered.

## These Questions Are Just a Start

Research is the best way to evaluate and choose a company to supply any business need. In the case of security and access control, the decision is even more important because the safety and protection of the customer's business is at stake. Questions a customer should ask manufacturers include topics such as where and how products are manufactured, business longevity, market focus, technical support, scalability, integration with other systems, and cybersecurity.

In the end, customers will likely develop their own set of questions that reflects their own company's specific concerns and needs. This dozen questions at least provide a place to start.

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Crystal Technologies Limited have a mass of experience in access control solutions for businesses across varies industries.

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