



Six physical-access security tips for returning to the workplace

BY IAN LOWE | AUGUST 2020

Having spoken with HID Global customers around the globe, we're sharing helpful guidance during this unprecedented time.

There's no doubt about it: The global pandemic will change the way we live, work, and conduct business for some time. Over the past several weeks, we've been working with customers to enable a safe return to the workplace. We've observed that the number of challenges in the mid- to long-term stage and the associated complexities vary by location. Thankfully, there are proactive measures and best practices that assist in a safe return to the workplace and settling into the new normal.

Common themes are emerging from our conversations with customers. We've compiled a list of the six most-

often-voiced concerns in physical-access security and our guidance to address them.

1. Building readiness

Customer question: How will we ensure our facilities are in acceptable working order to reopen?

After a building has been unoccupied for weeks or months, its readiness must be addressed completely before welcoming anyone inside. Even though the workforce might be eager to return, the workplace itself might not be ready. You might want to consider continuing remote work while facility operations are prepped. Some of your workforce will continue to work from home even after your buildings reopen, and that leads to the next question.

2. Workforce management

Customer question: When should we allow employees, contractors and visitors back into our facilities? How do we decide who's coming back and when?

While it's dependent on location and industry, taking a phased approach is the best course of action. First, you'll want facilities management to survey the property for readiness and then provide an estimate as to when employees may begin reporting back into the office.

Next, consider your office-density needs, which are interrelated with the facility architecture. You'll be able to accommodate a slightly higher capacity of workforce in an airy, open office space than in a constrained one. As a good rule of thumb, start by introducing no more than 30 percent of employees back into the workplace at first. This could be a rolling group model in which the population total remains controlled and constant, but specific individuals vary from day to day. This option is good for a workforce that needs to be together in person but not necessarily all at the same time due to office-density concerns.

In a business where visitors or customers come in regularly, delay opening the office to them as long as possible. If that's not feasible, then factor visitors into the total density count. An easy way to implement this is by using a cloud-based visitor-management system.

3. Access control

Customer question: How can we vet staff, employees, contractors, and visitors before and during the return?

This will vary greatly depending on location, but consider implementing policies that require employees to be screened regularly – and for an extended amount of time. For example, it would be helpful to obtain answers to the following questions:

- Where have you visited in the days since last entering the workplace?
- Have you come into contact with anyone else that has recently visited high-risk areas?
- Have you shown any symptoms of infection in the past xx number of days?

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If there is cause for concern, refuse the visit or supplement the screening process with additional steps. Temperature-checking is mandatory in many organizations – often multiple times a day. This applies to interactions at delivery bays, so take care to extend policies and monitoring in those areas as well. A policy-based, physical-identity and access-management solution integrated with your existing physical-access controls makes it possible to enforce, monitor, and report this type of activity.

4. Social distancing and contact-tracing plans

Customer question: How are the restrictions and guidelines related to physical-access control going to change as a result of social distancing?

Social distancing might continue within the office. Consider reworking the office layout for proper distance in between cubicles, workplace positions, and employees. Designate specific entrances, exits, and pathways as one-way only.

Once the employees are inside the workplace, you can assign them with Bluetooth LE beacons that monitor proximity to others and measure localized density in real-time by using technologies for location services, contact tracing, and surge response.

5. Reduced physical touchpoints

Customer question: *How can we reduce the number of physical touchpoints throughout the workplace? How do we go hands-free?*

Contactless technologies can help enforce social distancing and reduce touchpoints on common surfaces like faucets, doorknobs, coffee pot handles, etc. While introducing additional security checks and screenings, it's important to not increase touchpoints and further infection risks. We've seen an increase in requests for a contactless experience in secure workplace access, including automatic doors and turnstiles, contactless cards, and mobile access.

6. Confidence-inspiring communication

Customer question: *How do we ensure that both visitors and employees are aware of the policy changes and extra controls?*

Proactive communication is key in the reassurance that appropriate safety measures have been taken. Equally important is to communicate a policy change before it happens and the reasoning behind it. While we would all prefer to know exactly how long new policies will continue, this is a time of many unknowns. So while there isn't an exact expiration date on these new policies, ensuring that impacted individuals will have a safer experience is universally appreciated.



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