

# SECURITY Technology & Design

## Access Control & ID Management

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# Web-Hosted Access Control: The Business Case

Examining how the technology compares to traditional access control

By Bob Mosler

**W**eb-hosted access control is significantly gaining in popularity. Companies that choose a Web-hosted Access Control System (ACS) often cite the simplicity of the solution and the appeal of always having the newest features — without loading and upgrading software or needing a dedicated PC. Being able to manage remote sites from a single account is another plus, and accessing the system over the Internet using a standard Web browser means the system is always close by and user-friendly.

Even with this impressive list of benefits, traditional access control solutions remain the choice for many end-users. There are several considerations end-users take into account when choosing between the two options, and by examining these decision factors it will become clearer how Web-hosted systems effectively compete with the “older” technologies.

### Comparing True Costs

Cost remains a major consideration. With the two types of systems having such different options, it is not always easy to compare. A traditional system

may cost more up front, but the customer actually owns the system. The Web-hosted ACS is less of an initial investment, without having to purchase software, servers or new PCs, but it carries a recurring monthly fee.

Moving beyond this general observation, the reality is that there are monthly and yearly costs to any access control system. Traditional software-installed systems require:

- **Weekly database backups:** Whether you hire an IT person or have an IT department already, performing weekly backups takes time away from other duties. Even if the backups are automated, they still need to be checked and tested.

- **System updates:** All access control systems will require updates; whether quarterly or annually, or in between. Updates cost IT department time, can disrupt business, and may require an additional cost for the upgrade itself.

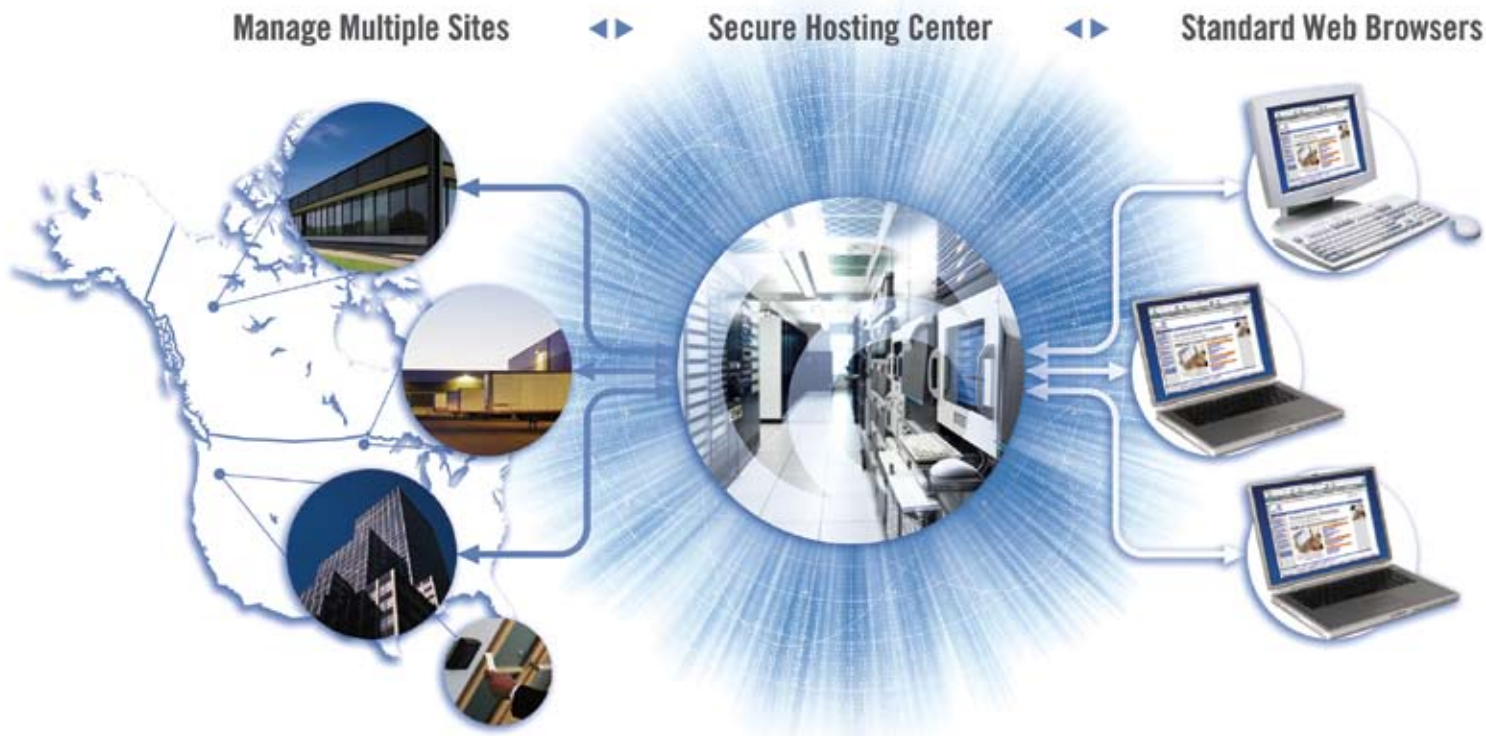
- **System upgrades:** Total system upgrades will typically be performed every three to five years. Depending on the extent of the upgrade, costs may include software, operating systems, PC stations, access control hardware and

more. This upgrade work often is done after-hours so as not to disrupt regular business and this overtime can be another significant cost.

- **Operating system updates:** Traditional access control systems are dependent on an operating system, often Windows. Security and general updates must be kept up and be compatible with the access control software. Again, time and money are involved.

- **Virus protection:** Any software should have virus protection. These costs add up and include anti-virus software, updates, compatibility issues, continuous deployment, and others.

Some end-users contend that the recurring fees associated with Web-hosted systems reduce any savings the system generates. However, any cost savings eroded by factoring in recurring monthly fees for Web-hosted access control are still cost savings. And across the life of PC-based systems, costs to upgrade both hardware and software can be exorbitant, without even taking into account the cost of staff and other resources to maintain the system on a daily, weekly and monthly basis as discussed above.



It is the long-term high costs of hardware and software that many clients are not prepared for — costs they often do not factor in when they evaluate the initial buying decision. In fact, customers who are facing upgrades to existing access control systems are often the best prospects for a Web-hosted solution.

While assessing the costs of various sized systems may be like comparing apples to oranges, other business decisions must be taken into account and will shed some additional light on the decision-making process.

### Aligning Access Control with Business Needs

All security policies and practices should align with the business's goals, culture and security requirements. Access control is no different; it would make little sense to install a system that is inappropriate for how the business must run or what its structure allows. Some specific market examples will demonstrate how the unique features of Web-hosted access control fit the specific needs of those businesses:

Property management is a substantial and growing vertical market served by Web-hosted access control systems. More and more property management firms are seeing the benefits of paying a nominal monthly fee for several reasons. Most importantly, it fits their model of charging tenants for services, while averaging out to virtually pennies per square foot for a base building service.

In addition, neither property manag-

ers nor their tenants are tied to a single PC or networked PC in their offices for access control. Also, with a Web-hosted model, property managers are not forced to set up a network infrastructure for remote facilities or deal with cumbersome dial-up connections — instead they can manage the system from anywhere they have Internet access.

Local government is another vertical market that is a great fit for a Web-hosted system. Multiple sites are easily managed under one account, avoiding access control silos that can create administrative headaches and security flaws. Wireless control panels protect remote sites such as water towers and other key infrastructure while avoiding the costs of additional network infrastructure. Crisis response is significantly improved with email notifications and digital records of system activity.

This effectiveness was demonstrated in a recent application, when the Village of Hoffman Estates of Illinois installed Brivo Systems' ACS WebService, a Web-hosted solution that includes wireless control panels and multiple DVRs recording more than 20 surveillance cameras. The solution is part of a complete security plan for which the Village recently won the 2007 Exceptional Performance in Safety award from the Chicago Metro chapter of the American Public Works Association.

A final point of comparison bears mention — and this is true for many organizations outside of property managers and local government — it is easier to budget

and control a monthly operating expense than a significant capital outlay every few years to update obsolete computers, operating systems and access control software. For this and the several reasons cited, a growing number of end-users are experiencing the numerous benefits Web-hosted systems offer over traditional access control systems. **ST&D**



*Bob Mosler is executive vice president of sales and marketing for Brivo. He has more than 30 years of experience in the electronic*

*security industry, including tenure in both the dealer and manufacturer segments. Prior to joining Brivo, Mr. Mosler was with Northern Computers, Diebold and ADT Security Systems. He has been a member of ASIS for more than 15 years.*



Brivo Systems, LLC  
4330 East West Highway, Suite 250  
Bethesda, MD 20814  
1-866-692-7486, option 1  
www.brivo.com