

KEY ISSUES FOR GAMING SECURITY

By Fernando Pires

With so much money flowing in and out in the form of cash and chips, casinos are a highly regulated world when it comes to security. One of the most critical areas of casino security is key control. Physical keys are used for access to the most sensitive and highly secured areas of the casino, including counting rooms and drop boxes, so the rules and regulations that relate to key control are extremely important in helping maintain tight control and minimize loss and fraud.

Casinos that are still using manual logs for key control are at constant risk due to the inaccuracies inherent in this system, including signatures that are missing or illegible. In addition, the manual sign-out process for keys is time consuming and error-prone. Analysis, reporting and investigation are highly labor intensive, as they involve digging through piles and boxes of log sheets, making it difficult to keep an accurate account of key use. This also has a negative impact on compliance. The answer to these issues lies in the use of an electronic key-control solution.

When choosing a key-control and -management solution that meets the needs of the casino environment, there are numerous features you should be sure to consider.

Multiple Layers of Security

Each individual user should face at least two layers of security before accessing any key in the system. It is not enough for biometric identification, a personal pin number or an ID card swipe to identify the user's credentials. The cabinet door should not open until the system verifies that the user has permission for the specific key requested.

The Three-Man Rule

For certain keys or key sets that are highly sensitive, compliance regulations require signatures from three individuals from three separate departments. These may include keys, drop boxes and counting rooms. Typically the three individuals would include a drop team member, a cage cashier and security officer.

A secure key-management system should be programmable to recognize these keys or key sets and only open the cabinet door and release them once the three required logins are complete and the credentials are verified. A system designed for user convenience will prompt for the additional logins only once, regardless of how many sets were initially requested.

Returning highly sensitive keys may be even more highly regulated with multiple levels of security required. For example, "Full Secure" would require that the same users who removed a key must return the key, while "Department Secure" would only require the first user's credentials to match exactly while the two other users would have to match by department. The key control system should be configurable to handle these levels and others as well.

Limitation of Access

Access to drop boxes outside of scheduled hours is another regulated area that requires specific functionality from a key-control system. In the case of an event such as a machine jam, customer dispute, machine relocation or maintenance, the user would typically be required to include a predefined note and freehand comment with an explanation of the situation before removing keys. In a casino environment, specific keys or key sets should be configurable so that the user is prompted for this information. Reports detailing unscheduled access, including the reason why the access occurred, should be available as required by many state and tribal gaming agencies. Additionally, emails and/or SMS text messages should automatically be generated any time those sets are accessed for unscheduled drops.

Access to table game drop-box release keys is limited to the specific employees who are authorized to remove the table-game drop boxes from the tables. These same individuals would be precluded from having access to table-game drop-box contents keys at the same time they have the table-game drop-box release keys out. Again, this functionality should be easily and conveniently configurable in a key-control solution.

Reporting

Gaming regulations require a number of different types of audits on a regular basis to assure the casino is in full compliance with regulations. For example, for employees signing the table-game drop-box keys in or out, Nevada gaming requirements call for maintenance of separate reports that indicate the date, time, table-game number, reason for access and signature or electronic signature. An electronic signature includes a unique employee PIN or card or an employee biometric identification validated and recorded through a computerized key-security system. The key-management system should have custom software that enables the user to set up all of these and many other types of reports, which can run and be delivered automatically to management on a regular basis. A robust reporting system will also greatly assist the business in tracking and improving processes, assuring employee honesty and minimizing security risks.

Convenience

It is useful for certain keys or key sets to be readily available to their authorized users. With an instant key-release feature, the user only needs to input their credentials and the system knows whether they already have their specific keys or not. If not, the system unlocks and their keys are immediately available. Returning keys is just as fast and easy. This saves time, reduces training and helps overcome any language barriers. Personnel such as housekeepers and slot floor attendants can be organized into groups. For them, the hotel and casino would have multiples of the same respective key sets available; the system releases the next available set to each authorized user from a group, which cycles through the sets so that each gets equal usage.

Gaming requirements do vary from state to state, as well as from tribe to tribe. The key-control and -management system chosen for deployment in a casino environment should be flexible, so that it can accommodate any of the above regulations and much more. It should also be modular and scalable, so the number of keys and the scope of features can change and grow along with the business. Finally, it should be easy to use, as training time can be costly and many different employees will need to be able to access the system. By keeping these elements in mind, a casino will be able to choose its key-control system wisely.



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Fernando Pires is VP of Sales and Marketing at Morse Watchmans. Morse Watchmans is a leading provider of market-proven products and technologies for key control, key security and key and asset management solutions and is driving the evolution of key control and security management systems in the security industry.



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