



# Key Security for Casinos



## Introduction

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Casinos and other gaming facilities face a growing number of security challenges. The possible risk factors when running a casino include the significant sums of cash on gaming floors and in cashier's cages, large crowds that can get rowdy, strict regulations with which to keep compliant, and extensive physical property and assets. Additionally, security must be in place to ensure that employee fraud does not occur. Casinos must dedicate a significant portion of their financial resources to security operations and access control in order to reduce the tremendous potential liability they face on a daily basis.

While it may come as something of a surprise in this increasingly-digital age, in many casino facilities physical keys are in everyday use to access the most sensitive and highly secured areas, including cash counting rooms and drop boxes. With cyber breaches becoming more and more of a concern, physical keys offer an alternative solution. Without the actual key in hand, there is no way to get into a counting room without physically breaching the door – something that cannot go unnoticed in the highly secure environment of a casino. For this reason, keys continue to be an important security solution for casinos – and therefore key control as well. While early key control consisted of a manual sign-out sheet and a physical key board for essential keys, in today's world any casinos still using manual logs for key control are at high risk.

A manual system presents many opportunities for inaccuracies or inconsistencies, such as signatures that are missing or illegible. The manual sign-out process for keys is time consuming, error-prone, and difficult to audit. Analysis, reporting and tracking require intensive manhours digging through piles of keys and boxes of log sheets. For an industry with strict compliance needs, this can quickly become an insurmountable problem.

For this reason, casinos large and small rely on key control to manage the many keys that help to keep their business operational. Key control systems can provide better security for highly sensitive keys, easier and more accurate reporting and compliance, and more convenience for users and security personnel alike.

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## **An Introduction to Key Control**

A key control system is comprised of networked key cabinets which require user credentials to distribute keys to authorized users and provide management with up-to-the-minute knowledge of which keys have been removed, who has removed them, and when and where they are replaced.

After inputting a variety of credentials, potentially including biometrics, PINs, and ID cards, users are given access to the cabinet, which releases only their specific requested key. For casinos, this could include the keys to counting rooms, VIP areas, drop boxes, hotel rooms, lockers, and a variety of other locations that require security. When users are ready to return a key, they input their similar credentials at any key cabinet on the system and replace the keys.

The key control system software provides a wealth of information as to key usage. This includes which users have keys out at any given time, which keys have been removed, keys that are overdue, any notes input in to the system by users, and a variety of other data. Notifications can also be sent to specified personnel when certain keys are removed or replaced, if an attempt is made to

access the cabinet without authorization, or in other pre-defined circumstances. This information can also be collected in reports on the system or sent immediately as notifications to designated security personnel.

## **Key Control Makes Compliance Easier**

Compliance with gaming regulations is an essential requirement for the operation of every casino. The regulations for running a gaming business are both extensive and complex in order to ensure that operations are scrupulously legal, and they can vary greatly from region to region. For example, for employees signing the table game drop box keys in or out, Nevada Gaming requirements call for maintenance of separate reports indicating the date, time, table game number, reason for access, and signature or electronic signature. Regulations are subject to constant change, and remaining in compliance with regulations even as these changes occur is a top priority for any security operation within a casino. Keys and their storage and use are often the subject of regulation.

Being caught out of compliance can be devastating to a casino. In addition to leaving a casino vulnerable to the security risks that the regulations were put into place to avoid, being out of compliance can result in significant fines, closure of parts of the gaming



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floor, or even closure of the casino itself—a risk that no one can afford. For this reason, compliance is a top priority, particularly as regulations evolve.

Key control systems can help casinos remain in compliance with regulations. Using key control software, it is possible to create a variety of types of reports, including those required by state, federal, local, or tribal gaming agencies. Publication and delivery of reports can be automated, requiring significantly less manpower and time, and they are always accurate and on time – something that cannot be guaranteed with manually generated reports. These reports can be delivered automatically to the inbox of relevant security personnel and/or pulled up within the software when requested.

Key management systems in a casino environment can also be set up with customized rules to meet the three-man regulation for sensitive or restricted key sets—usually a drop team member, cage cashier, and security officer. The system can be configured to recognize these sets of keys, and only allow access to them if the three required logins are completed. Additionally, notifications can be set up to alert security personnel via text and email if these keys are being requested, to keep management apprised of when certain keys have been removed or replaced.

## **Layered Security for Added Assurance**

Key control is an issue of access. Many employees at a casino cannot do their job without having access to keys, but it's just as important to ensure that those without authority cannot take possession of keys improperly.

Key control systems for casinos are configurable so that each can meet the specific needs of the organization using that system. In some cases, the same users who removed a key must be the users who return it to help ensure that nobody else has accessed a secure area, and the key control system will send an alert should another user attempt to access the system. In another case, the system may recognize the user as authorized as long as the credentials match by department or other designated authorization, and open the cabinet for removal or return of the necessary key. In another example, a key set to remove a drop box can be set up so that it can only be removed at specific times of day. These programs are easily reconfigured based on the needs of the users or evolving regulations, which makes it simple to control key usage across a large organization based on changing needs.

While configuring a key control system to enforce regulations can help keep casinos in compliance and on schedule, it's also essential to have access to the system in

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case of unexpected incidents. In emergency situations such as a gaming machine jam, relocation or maintenance, or a customer dispute, where key sets must be accessed outside of regularly scheduled times, key control systems can be programmed with auditable “notes”. Before a key is released, the system will prompt the user to select a predefined note plus enter a freehand comment, allowing users to describe the circumstances and the need for the specific key or key set. These notes can be retrieved from within the system or sent to security personnel should security teams require information about the access of specific keys.

Authorized users appreciate the convenience of fast key retrieval. For certain situations, the key control system can allow for a user to input only their credentials – the system will recognize whether they already have their specific keys or not. If not, the system will unlock and make those immediately available. This helps to save time, reduces the amount of training necessary for new users who may not require higher-security keys, and helps to overcome any language barriers.

## **Network Connections for Easier Management**

More and more casinos are putting security and other business systems on the network for increased convenience and integration. This allows a security team that operates throughout multiple sites to work from a central location for increased oversight. Key control systems operate on the same premise, providing a common user database that is shared by multiple cabinets across the enterprise.

Using an enterprise key control system that is highly scalable, it is easy to add new key cabinets as business grows or changes without having to install an entirely new system with new software, training and the associated costs. With a single system in place across a large network, it's simpler to manage many thousands of keys from a central location and alert individual security personnel on the ground to any issues, which helps to increase efficiency and accuracy should any issues occur. A networked key



## **Hospitality**

**Many casinos are operated within a larger hospitality facility that includes dining, a spa, shopping and hotel. These systems often need to be segregated from casino security, but operate on partitioned versions of the same system to provide efficiency and ease of training. For these applications, it's important to look for a key control system that provides key management for both casino and hospitality operations.**

Key control can help to control congestion at high-traffic times of day, such as when housekeeping begins their day and requires access to the many room keys of the floors they are cleaning. Key cabinets placed throughout the hotel can ensure that housekeeping has easy access to their keys without making it more difficult for those who work in the kitchen or the front desk to get access.

**Auditable key control also helps to provide security to guests in individual rooms while reducing liability for the hotel. Key control reduces the possibility that keys can be removed without authorization, or that those with authorization keep keys past a designated time. Overdue key alarms and notifications to security personnel help to ensure that all keys are promptly returned. Should a breach occur, it is simple to search within the key control system and identify the individual who removed keys to the accessed room.**

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control system can also make it easier to find and return keys across a massive and complex casino facility by indicating to security personnel where keys have been returned. In addition, networked key control can help to relieve congestion at high usage times. With key control cabinets distributed across the casino's network adjacent to the areas where the keys will be used, bottlenecks in accessing/returning the keys can be avoided.

Key control that integrates with access control can help to ensure that multi-site key control is as tightly managed as key control for a single area. A common user database between systems helps to ensure that an employee's HR-issued ID is recognized across all key control systems in an organization, which allows for auditing transactions and history even after an employee's departure. This also makes it possible for the slots, cage and security departments each to have their own system, with users part of the same common user database but with different permissions for each system. This helps to eliminate confusion for users by eliminating the need to remember three different access codes for their authorized keys. In addition, it's simple to add or terminate new employees within the key control system as they are added or terminated within access control.

## **Conclusion**

Security for casinos needs to be strict and adhere to compliance regulations – but it must also be simple to operate and easy to audit in order to protect patrons from risk and protect the casino from liability. An essential part of casino security, key control is necessary to ensure that employees only have permission to take keys they are authorized to use and that those keys are returned in a timely and organized manner. A key control system that manages all of the keys in a widespread and scalable network can help to reduce risk and make day-to-day casino operations more manageable.