Western Michigan University

FAST FACTS

Customer
Western Michigan University

Industry
Higher Education

Geography
Michigan

Challenges
Large Deployment of over 1,000 doors and 2,000 employees

Desire to replace expensive and ineffective existing system

Solution
Open Options DNA Fusion Access Control

Allegion's Schlage AD locks

CUSTOMER

Located in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Western Michigan University is a national research university serving students from across the United States and 100 additional countries. Founded in 1903, WMU is a learning-centered, discovery-driven and globally engaged public university that stands out among America's more than 4,600 higher education institutions. WMU's campuses encompass 1,289 acres, 167 buildings, and serve more than 50,000 students and patrons.

CHALLENGES

With over 1,000 doors to manage throughout the expansive WMU campus — and 2,000 employees requiring varying levels of card access — WMU's security needs extended well beyond what keyed locks could provide. They deployed access control software several years ago, but became increasingly dissatisfied with their previous provider due to expensive and ineffective upgrades and a lack of prompt technical support. When faced with yet another upgrade in 2010, WMU Security Systems Administrator Bob Coffman began to look elsewhere for access control software.

Coffman and his team worked with Kalamazoo-based security system integrator Knight Watch, Inc., to outline their needs. Building coordinators required card access and the power to lock and unlock their own doors according to their differing time schedules. Previously, building coordinators would have to contact Coffman's department to schedule when to lock and unlock doors.

They also had problems under their previous system with people holding doors open. In dormitories, for example, students would open side doors to let unregistered visitors in, often with prohibited substances such as alcohol. WMU sought the ability to limit building access in this situation to one entrance located near a manned front desk which not only controlled door access, but also provided the ability for security to directly observe resident comings and goings.

SOLUTION

In searching for a new access control provider, Coffman and Knight Watch invited a few companies to compete for the project by setting up their software and converting the system for a few weeks for a "test run" prior to making a decision.

"Open Options did a little extra in our test run conversion and when we asked a couple of the other companies competing for the project to do the same they wanted to charge us to do it, yet Open Options did it at no cost. Open Options was the only company that went above and beyond what we had originally asked for," says Coffman.

WMU tested Open Options DNA Fusion access control software and were very impressed, that's when Coffman says he and his team received a bonus: the cost

"We asked for the price to switch over and Open Options beat everyone else — even what it would have cost us to stay with our existing provider for the upgrade they told us we needed," he says.

In less than 10 days, the WMU campus converted to DNA Fusion and they have been more than satisfied in the years since. DNA Fusion provides a complete access control solution including door control, visitor management, and photo ID management in an open

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platform that interfaces seamlessly with other systems such as video, biometrics, and intercoms.

Coffman has conducted all of the training for the more than 80 current WMU employees that access the system. He says the ease of use has really captured the attention of WMU's end users.

"Our building users absolutely love DNA Fusion access control software," says Coffman. "We have hundreds of time schedules controlling doors with the system and it has made a lot of end users very happy that they no longer have to go around and do it manually. We now allow our building coordinators to control their own building locking schedule and they also are able to give and remove access when they want to — they no longer have to put in a call to have it done by me or my staff or wait for us to be available."

Coffman says they have also used the system to test their capability to lockdown their campus in the event of a threat, an increasingly common occurrence that all campuses must prepare for these days.

"With a push of a button, our police dispatcher can lock down the whole campus or return it to normal. They can also do it by building if they want too," he says. "This has been a big plus and something we have wanted for years. We test the lockdown once a year and we have also given some coordinators the option to lock down their own buildings, if needed."

Allegion's Schlage AD locks enable the lockdown capability. The project includes a total of 127 AD 400 network wireless electronic locks (93 with the Mortise chassis; 34 with the Exit trim chassis). The AD 400's patent-pending modular design allows the locks to be customized to fit the needs of an application now, and changed to meet future needs without removing it from the door. This provides invaluable support for a multi-campus deployment on a budget.

When they do experience the occasional issue with the system that they can't fix on their own, Coffman says Open Options' technical support team quickly addresses and fixes the problem, whereas their previous provider sometimes took days to address a problem and would charge extra for the consultation.

Coffman has called WMU's choice to switch to Open Options' DNA Fusion software as their access control provider one of the "best decisions" they have made.

"The navigation of DNA Fusion is very easy to use, especially if you have never operated a security system before. Even the upgrades are simple — I don't have to run around to all of the end users anymore where it is installed!" he says. "The system is very reliable which has saved us both time and money. Switching over to Open Options has proven to be an overall upgrade in terms of value, usability, and system support for the university."

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