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The Importance of Tenant Identification

By Julia P. Shih

Using card-scanning technology to protect your business and customers

In the age of post-9/11, various industries—self-storage included—are finding it necessary to implement heightened security measures, if not for their own protection, then that of their clients. Specific to self-storage, one simple yet extremely effective means of tightening security is requiring tenants to provide official documents (driver's license, passport, immigration card, etc.) to verify their identity and provide a record of information. As more self-storage managers implement this requirement, they find the practice beneficial in terms of security; but it can also minimize losses when it comes to collecting delinquent payments.

The Value of ID Checks

Storage operators have the right to require photo identification from tenants during the application process—as long it is required, without discrimination, from all customers. This is a valuable right that should be exercised. Everyone in this country legally should be able to obtain and present some form of photo ID, be it a driver's license, state- or country-issued identification card, passport or immigration card.

By asking for photo ID during the initial application, a manager can ensure the information on the application or lease matches the information on the card. If the information is incongruous, you could have a suspicious candidate. Checking ID will deter applicants from providing false information and allow facilities to run more accurate and comprehensive credit and criminal-record checks.

In addition, the more information you have about a tenant, the more figurative insurance you will have against future problems, such as delinquent rent. While most facilities ask tenants for a name, address and Social Security number, it is also a good idea to ask for home and work phone numbers where the tenant can be reached, as well as emergency-contact information. A photo ID will not only help verify the street address, but also the tenant's physical description. A copy of the ID will provide a record to keep on file. By being diligent with information gathering during the initial application process, operators will be more equipped to track down errant tenants.

ID Technology

There are several valuable technologies that allow storage operators to collect and file photo IDs and the information they contain, as well as verify their validity. Leading the market are driver's-license scanners that scan cards in a matter of seconds and provide saved files of the person's photo and signature.

Some high-end scanners have OCR (optical character recognition) functionality that "reads" a card's face. OCR is the only card-reading technology that can read ID cards from all 50 states. When a card is scanned, the textual information on its surface, such as name, address, birthdate, etc., are automatically placed in appropriate text fields in a database, eliminating the tedious need to manually type all information from the card.



These scanners are great solutions for information-gathering because they provide a better-quality captured image than a photocopy. They also collect information in far less time than it would take a facility manager to collect it manually; and they can put the information into databases that facilitate other tasks, such as billing or customer tracking.

On the Lookout

Though photo ID is an extremely valuable tool, storage operators must be vigilant to ensure an ID presented by a tenant is

Advantages to Storage

Card scanners using OCR technology or all three reading abilities allow operators to quickly scan a driver's license while a customer waits and tailor the information or collective database toward his specific business needs. These scanners can very well increase a facility's profitability by making operations more efficient and increasing closing ratios through a more complete database for tenant follow-up.

In a business where every visitor is a potential sale, driver's-license card scanners could be the newest product to provide an edge over competitors. Through the simple task of reading and copying a customer's photo ID, a storage owner can cover his bases in terms of knowing who his tenants are and verifying their identities. He can also save money down the line by making it easier to collect delinquent payments.



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not doctored or fake. Obviously, if the photo or description on the card does not match the physical appearance of the customer (i.e., the card shows a birthdate in the 1950s, but the applicant is a young man in his twenties), something suspicious is afoot, and more investigation is necessary. Doctored cards, on the other hand, can be trickier to recognize.

There are reference books on the market that describe and include pictures of each state's driver's license as well as various forms of international identification. These books are fairly inexpensive and can be great resources for verifying ID cards. The only problem is they are limited in their coverage of international IDs, as well as the newer, updated formats of driver's licenses constantly being issued.

More accurate ways of verifying photo ID involve using technologies built into the cards themselves. As many as 25 states include a loaded magnetic strip on the back of their driver's licenses—much like those on credit cards—that contain the cardholder's information. Magnetic strips can be read very quickly. The downside is they tend to demagnetize easily, so it becomes difficult to read driver's licenses that are not in good condition. Furthermore, not all of the information on the card front is stored in its magnetic strip.

Similarly, there are 20 to 25 states that issue cards with information loaded into a barcode. Barcode reading is extremely accurate; but, like magnetic strips, barcodes can be made less translatable due to wear and tear. Several state ID cards include magnetic strips *and* barcodes.

A card scanner capable of reading all card technologies—OCR, magnetic strip and barcode—will be able to compare the information stored on a card and cross-check it for matches. While an expert forger may be able to doctor the face of the card, it is highly unlikely he would be able to tamper with either the barcode or magnetic strip.

Julia P. Shih is marketing manager for Card-Scanning Solutions, a developer of card-reading systems. Its systems, based on OCR (optical character recognition) technology, are designed to quickly and accurately read the information from driver's licenses, passports and other ID cards. The company's software provides extensive database capabilities for automatically processing, storing and manipulating acquired data. For more information, call 310.691.8920; e-mail julia@card-scan.com; visit www.card-scan.com.