

Growing Business Revenues with Cloud-Based Access Control and Video

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Health club management technology company Shape.Net Software strengthens business line-up with Brivo Systems' hosted security services

While health and fitness clubs and wellness centers can help their clients sculpt their bodies and change their lifestyles, many of them are out of shape when it comes to management technology. At least, that's been Larry King's perspective, ever since the fall of 2001, when he launched a business designed to help clubs be smarter about their business.

"I was a customer of a high-end club in Manhattan, and they were using note cards," King (pictured)



said. Using his Wall Street-honed programming skills, he wrote a simple scheduling system. As King visited prospects, he would learn more about what the clubs needed or wanted, such as electronic funds transfers, then build those features into his tool.

Now, eight years later, King serves more than 300 health and fitness club clients with his Web-based club management system, Shape.Net. The hosted software provides all the administrative functions a club requires--member enrollment, management, billing and payment, class and individual training scheduling and more. Members at clubs can also access the system to check their accounts and maintain fitness records. "We've really specialized on tools for this industry," said King.

Those tools include biometric readers, barcode scanners and coded cards for access control during check-in at a gym. But some of his clients were telling King they needed more and different security to support their plans to stay open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. "The way people work these days, they like to work out at night," said King. "By being open then, the clubs are tapping into another market."

Sticking with the Web

King's thinking is that Shape.Net should focus on technology so his clients can focus on their clubs. So he wanted an access control system he could recommend that would integrate--easily--with his own club management software and be easy for his clients to use.

Further, he was a big believer in using web-based solutions, having launched Shape.net in 2002 when many Internet patrons were still using dial-up connections. "I knew broadband would kick in, so I stuck to my guns," King said.

Insisting on a hosted access control solution did limit the number of vendors he vetted. "I had to find a pretty cutting-edge solution," King said.

Integration Solves Business Issues

The solution King feels comfortable recommending, as announced in April, turned out to be the hosted access control solution offered by Brivo Systems. Brivo's ACS WebService is built on an open IP-based

platform and uses the extensible markup language (XML) standard for communicating with other open, IP-based systems.

In Shape.net's case, the integration between its management software and ACS WebService is cloud-to-cloud. In turn, when Shape.net clients choose to install WebService, they work directly with a local Brivo integrator or dealer. Because the security hardware, such as readers and/or video cameras, connects directly to the cloud-based servers, the club does not need to install computing hardware beyond at least one device with internet access for accessing records.

When hardware installation is complete, the club notifies Shape.net, which then populates Brivo's hosted database with the club's membership information. With the two systems now synchronized, any identity or payment status changes in Shape.net automatically update ACS WebService--without intervention by club personnel.

The integration was critical to solving a major club business problem: patrons with expired memberships or behind in payments continuing to use club facilities. This generally happens, King said, when clubs fail to update their security systems with data from a billing or membership system. "There are horror stories of members still getting in six months to a year after their memberships are cancelled," he said. "It's rampant."

With automatic data synchronization between member management and access control, the problem is effectively eliminated, King said.

Additional Revenue Opportunities

Linking physical access control to identity data--in this case, billing status--does more than increase security, King said. It also enables his clients to operate more efficiently and offer new services.

For example, the integration reduces club administration duties, with enrollment and payment data collected by Shape.net software automatically updating access information in ACS WebService. Gym owners can access the system any time from any device with an Internet connection. The system collects statistics on who enters the club when, enabling gyms to staff more effectively for peak periods.

With strong access control, clubs can stay open round-the-clock without adding desk staff to ensure only paid-up patrons have club access. By adding Brivo's hosted video service, OVR, they can monitor expensive equipment as well as link employee and member images to card swipes or key pad entries. "Just having the camera there is a deterrent," said King.

Clubs can also make specific areas of the facility available at premium fees, such as daycare centers or tanning booths, then control access to them via keypads or card readers. "Especially in tight times, you need to be savvy," King said.

No Worries

With web-based services, clients pay monthly fees rather than make an upfront investment in on-site servers, networking infrastructure and IT staff. This is particularly an advantage for health and fitness clubs, said King, allowing them to focus on their patrons instead of trying to manage IT systems.

Security in the cloud is rarely a worry these days, King said, especially when they discuss existing data security measures. "I ask them how often they back up their data," he said. "The answer usually is 'I don't.' I tell them we'll make them more secure by using a Web-based system."

King noted his servers and those at Brivo reside behind multiple layers of security measures, protective measures in which his clients and prospects rarely invest on their own.

Next Steps

As of this writing, King is negotiating with Brivo Systems to resell that company's solutions. Shape.net would continue to use local integrators for hardware design and installation, with King and his staff the point of contact for them. "I know the gyms and their needs really well," said King.

The bottom line for King is that integrating business management software with access control and video enables him to meet his clients' needs, the philosophy on which he's built Shape.Net. "I can give them all the things they need to make their business better," said King.