ProdataKey Access Control

Boosts Synagogue Security

**WORSHIP FACILITY
CASE STUDY**
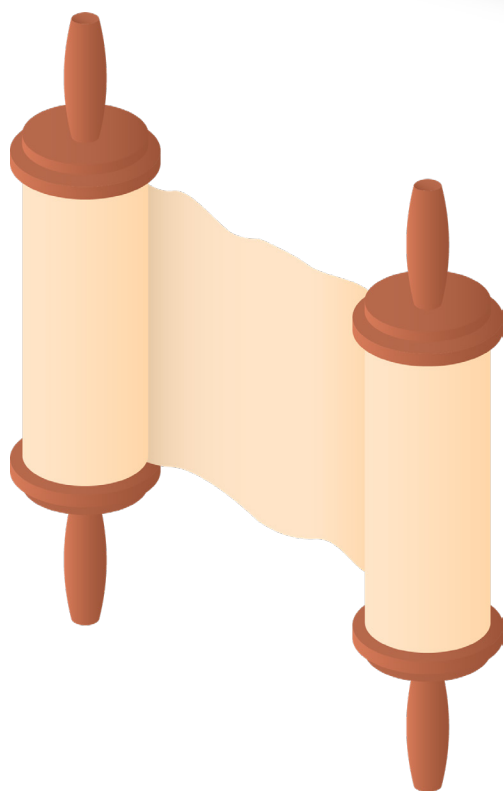
STORY

Access control systems serve many purposes, and technology partners are chosen based on their ability to deliver on specific customer needs. A few years ago, a New York-area synagogue installed a wireless, cloud-based access control system, manufactured by ProdataKey (PDK), for its ability to deliver "convenience"—in this case, helping the congregation's head of operations manage and automate the complex schedule of locking and unlocking doors to its building. However, following the tragic attack at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue in late October 2018, this synagogue, as well as Jewish congregations, community centers, and day schools nationwide, are reevaluating their security protocols, including maximizing the capabilities of technology that is already in place. In this case, an access control system chosen for one set of criteria will now be called upon to deliver in many other ways. Fortunately, the PDK solution is up to the task.

For security reasons, the congregation highlighted in this story wishes to remain anonymous. In keeping with that request, we have also changed the name of our contact at the synagogue to shield her identity.

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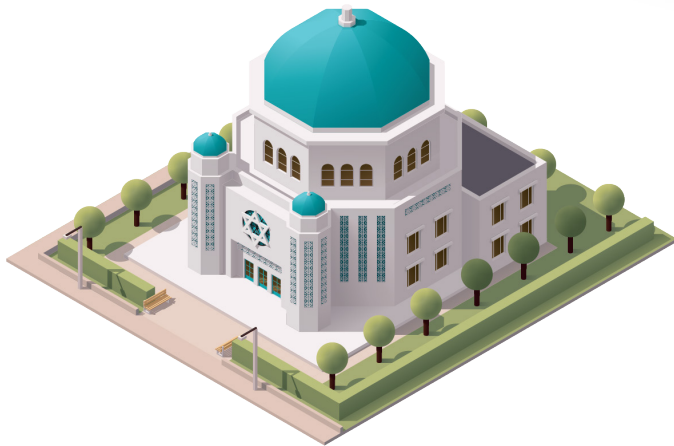
THE FACILITY

The synagogue is a new building, having been completed only about three years ago and located in a vibrant Jewish Community. "The building is about 10,000 square-feet on three floors. On the main floor, we have the sanctuary, offices, a coat room, a library, and restrooms," says Head of Operations Leah Greenberg. "Upstairs we have classrooms that we use for kids on the Sabbath and also for lectures or other events, as well as a balcony section to the sanctuary used by the women for prayer. Downstairs, there is a kitchen and a large multipurpose room for events."

The synagogue worked with Managing Director Tom Parker of Gemba Security, based in Warwick, New York, to install an access control system that would meet the unique needs of the congregation. "Tom was in it from the beginning. He's been guiding us throughout the whole process. He's been a wealth of knowledge and has brainstormed with me on different options available." Greenberg states.

"We have a very limited budget and limited resources, not just financially but in terms of what we can do within the building in light of Sabbath restrictions," she adds.

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CREATING CONVENIENCE

Under normal circumstances, the synagogue keeps its two front doors locked except for at certain times—some of these times occur on a regular schedule, some are dictated by special events, and some change weekly based upon the time of sunset. The Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown on Fridays, and Orthodox Jews have a prohibition against using technology on the Sabbath. A flexible, programmable solution that could automate the ever-changing schedule, as well as to allow congregants to enter on the Sabbath without using access control cards or other technological means, would provide a huge convenience to both Greenberg and members of the congregation.

"Without such a system, somebody had to run over to the synagogue and lock and unlock the doors as needed. Now it's automated and can also be handled remotely from Leah's phone," says Parker.

The PDK solution allows Greenberg to do the programming. "It's very easy to navigate. For example, there is always a prayer service at 6:15 a.m. So, I've been able to pre-program the doors to always unlock before that service, and then lock back up after it ends," she explains. Around the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, there could be 10 to 15 door openings and closings in a single day, with various groups entering the building at different times. I can even set the doors to unlock for a quick five-minute window if I know a package is going to arrive and I want to let the delivery person in."
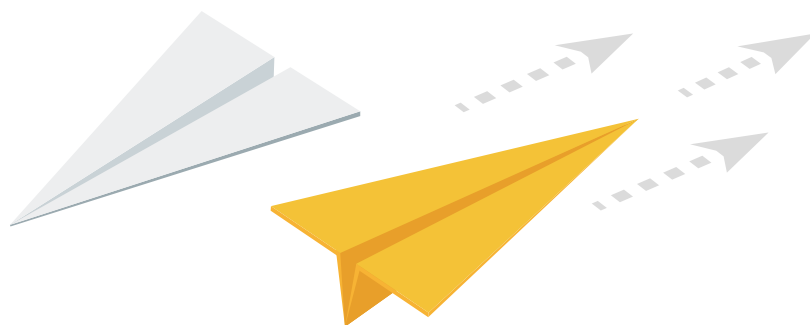
Parker says that it was this user-friendly interface that made the PDK solution the obvious choice. "We knew that Leah was going to have to manage a fairly complex door schedule. PDK has a simple, non-intimidating user interface—whether you're accessing it from the web on a computer at the office, from home or on the mobile app. It's a very clean, crisp tool," he states.

> "I've been very happy with the system. It has worked well for me. I've even been out of the country and been able to set the doors," notes Greenberg.

CHANGING COURSE

On October 27, 2018, during Saturday morning services at the Tree of Life Synagogue, a right-wing extremist shot to death 11 people and injured seven more. The reverberations were felt at synagogues around the United States, including Greenberg's. "As you can probably imagine, Monday morning, right after the Pittsburgh tragedy, Tom was definitely my first call of the day," she recalls.

Until the shootings, individuals who had a regular need to access the building at times outside the weekly schedule possessed their own security code that they entered on a keypad mounted beside the front doors. This group included, for example, the rabbi, the janitor, and the executive board members.

Now, says Greenberg, the doors are locked all the time. For the time being, she has supplied a general code to all congregants to give them access to the building while also hardening it. "That's not our end solution, but it's what we're doing right now while we're working with Homeland Security and others on how to keep our building as safe as possible."

One option under consideration is custom codes issued to all congregants for egress through the front doors during approved hours. The PDK interface would make that easy to set up and administer.

"We're juggling this fine line between being inviting and being safe. You want people to feel like it's an open synagogue that's welcoming, that people coming here know they are wanted. By making it too hardened, we risk making people feel like they're not welcome," Greenberg says.

Thus far, the Sabbath prohibition against technology has also been handled successfully. "We have a utilitarian entrance that has a mechanical key lock with buttons. Everyone in the congregation has the code to the lock for that side door. It's not electronic and is not on the PDK system. That's permitted because there's no electronics going on there," she explains.

SCALABILITY & FLEXIBILITY

A major bright spot in this security challenge is the high level of adaptability of the cloud-based, wireless PDK solution already in place.

Right now, both a lockdown and a lockout can be initiated from a quickly accessible wired button installed at a convenient location. When pressed, it locks the doors and disables the outside keypad. There is also a wired "all clear" button elsewhere in the building that must be pushed to reverse the lockdown and lockout.

In addition, the rabbi and the head of security have been issued wireless emergency fobs that give them the ability to trigger the full lockdown and lockout as well as reset the system to an "all clear" status.

According to Parker, "We're talking about expanding the synagogue's current lockdown system—making it a fully integrated AV lockdown, so if someone hits their lockdown button, whether wired or wireless, it would broadcast an audio message and light up strobe lights throughout the building, as well as send an automated call to the police." Additionally, he says, "It could be used to lock certain internal doors, such as those to the

stairwells, so an attacker couldn't get upstairs to where kids are in classrooms."

Because the PDK solution is scalable, "We can just hang another door controller and jump it on to the wireless network configuration," Parker explains. "It will be easy to add more doors without running access-control banana cable through their whole facility. And it's a beautiful facility, already finished, so we don't want to cut open walls and ceilings to add to the system. The solution allows us to be sensitive to these considerations."

Parker opines that there are definite advantages to solutions that give the end user possibilities for the future. As is evidenced by the Pittsburgh synagogue attack, security needs can change, sometimes in the mere second it takes to fire a bullet. Other times, the reason is benign or downright positive—the growth of an organization or its choice to integrate new technologies with the present solution.

In good times and bad, the synagogue's investment in PDK will continue to deliver, even as the ways in which the system is used grow and evolve.

EASy EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM

HOW TO INITIATE AN EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION

What Activates During an Emergency Notification?

Starting the process MUST BE SIMPLE

Automating and integrating the alert process reduces the potential for human error. In times of duress people are likely to forget their duty, need to protect themselves, or simply may not be able to follow through. EASy virtually eliminates the potential for human error

Instantly and Automatically Call for HELP

Quickly alerting 1st Responders of an emergency minimizes their time to respond. A faster response leads to less damage to people and property EASy will immediately place the call

Override Public Address Systems

Instantly broadcasting a live or prerecorded message over the public address system alerts students and staff to enact theiremergency measures EASy will take control of the public address system

Activate Visual Alerts

Strobe lights and message boards provide visual alert and information to those who may not have heard the emergency announcement EASy will activate the visual alert systems

Lock/Lock Out Doors

Instantly secures doors to delay or block unauthorized access to secured areas. Prevents inadvertent entrance to the secured areas EASy will signal your electronic access control system

Mass Notification

Push alerts through telephones, text messages and email to groups relevant to the emergency at hand EASy alerts the masses in seconds

Multi-Building Alert Off Site/Off Campus

Sends alerts to other buildings, whether on or off campus EASy has the ability to leverage network and/or wireless transmissions

EASy by Gemba ... because SECONDS matter!

Gemba
SECURITY·SOLUTIONS

About Gemba Security Solutions

Gemba is a team of security integrators that specialize in the design and deployment of cross-platform security, multi-modal mass notification, and communication systems. With a deep knowledge and understanding of the challenges faced by today's facilities, Gemba has the ability to develop state-of-the-art solutions that are, effective, noninvasive, and fiscally responsible. Gemba sets itself apart by leveraging existing infrastructure to create seamless, fully integrated security and emergency alert systems. With Gemba you can be confident that the measures you have taken will improve your overall security environment. It's Gemba's mission is to provide every customer with a solution that instills confidence and safety.

In addition to our alarm licenses and vendor certifications, Gemba is certified by Texas State University, and the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) program with an emphasis on "Civilian Response to Active Shooter (Attack) Events."

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