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# Purchasing Checklist

## Key Management Systems



**Before you buy, read...**

# *The Purchasing Checklist: Key Management Systems*

**There are many key management systems on the market today, and many competing providers making similar claims. To help you make an informed choice, Key Tracer has pulled from its 26 years of industry experience to present a key management purchasing guide. Whether you're buying a key control system for the first time, or looking to upgrade your existing system, these are the best practices you'll want to keep in mind. Here are ten straightforward steps to guide your planning and purchasing process.**

## 1 Start by Defining Your Challenges and Goals

When searching for the ideal key control system, start by outlining what specific security challenges you face today. Consider the specific costs and risks for your organization associated with lost keys, the cost of managing key access, and producing key transaction records.

Then determine what your security goals are for the future. Do you want increased awareness of key locations in your facility? Better control over key access by individual or job type? More detailed reporting?

Thinking these through first, before actually looking at products, helps clarify your organization's priorities, and will better inform the rest of your purchasing process.

## 2 Plan Your Installation

You will also want to determine what size and type of key cabinet best fits your needs. Think about the optimal location at your facility to install the key control system. Then perform a preliminary audit of your infrastructure and work processes:

- Catalog access points, door hardware, and other installed locks
- Document the day-to-day operational needs of employees and external service providers
- Identify locations in your facility where these operations are performed
- Assess which individuals have which keys, and which doors they access
- Use this information to determine your security Five W's: Who accesses What, Where, When, and Why

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## 3 Investigate: Key Controls

Now you are ready to research products. There are two important features to ask vendors about when comparing system reliability: RFID and locking mechanisms.

The locking mechanism controls access to keys. It only allows authorized users to access the key panel, and only the specific keys assigned to them. Unassigned keys remain locked in place.

If all you need to do is track who took which key when, without restricting the access to certain sets of keys, then a locking system may not be a requirement for your business. Ask your vendor whether their range of products includes options with and without a locking system.

Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) is a reliable, short-range wireless technology that allows for the automatic identification and tracking of product tags attached to objects. This makes for fast, error-free key transactions.

Unlike using a barcode reader to track or log your key or asset use, RFID tag scans do not need to be within line of sight of the reader. They can even be embedded in assets.



### Advantages of RFID Technology

- Virtually maintenance-free: corrosion-resistant, waterproof, lifetime warranties
- Minimal or no key tag replacement/repair costs
- Real-time key transaction recording
- Reduces key loss and theft



## 4 Investigate: User Controls

Also make a point to ask vendors about the number of users their systems can support, as well as how many different administrative and user profiles can be created. These profiles allow you to tailor access levels to your specific operational needs. The number of users supported may affect pricing, so make sure to discuss any additional costs with your vendor when comparing the total cost of ownership (TCO) and return on investment (ROI) for each key management solution

Another aspect to consider is the ability to restrict user access to different keys or assets. You will need to decide whether it's important to ensure that individuals or groups can access only the keys you have assigned, while all other unauthorized keys remain locked in place. Systems may also offer multiple verification options, such as a PIN code, an access control card, or a biometric reader. So consider which makes the most sense for your environment.

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## 5 Investigate: After-Sales Service and Support

As you research your options, compare the guaranteed response time among providers: is it within minutes? Two hours? Four hours or more? Is service available 24/7? Ask for references whom you can speak with about the quality and timeliness of support services.

## 6 Project TCO Across Five Years

Usually price comparison sheets only disclose upfront costs. But the true Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) includes expenses incurred over the expected lifetime of the system. To better inform your purchasing decision, be sure to do a full TCO cost comparison. Include hardware and software expenses for licensing, support, system updates, customization, reporting, and ongoing maintenance of your system.

Ask vendors how current their hardware technology is, and how they have kept it updated. It may seem like buying older technology will save you some money today, but older technology is more costly to maintain. Hardware and labor costs scale upwards as equipment ages. Older technology also tends to be less adaptable to current business trends, and may not appropriately scale or evolve as your needs change. Most often, in the long run you'll save by investing in more advanced hardware right away.

Also ask about warranty options. Some vendors provide a standard one-year warranty, while others have expanded options. Is the warranty all-inclusive? If not, what's excluded and what are the cost implications if something goes wrong?



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## 7 Investigate: Customization Options

A key control system can usually be integrated with an existing physical security or asset management systems without costly upgrades or overhauls. Ask vendors about the possibility of integrating their key control products with other security systems as part of a facility's security network.

This might allow you to extend the functionality of your key control system, make the transition easier from an operational standpoint, make it easier for users to adapt, and increase the value that you get from the technology. For example, some asset control systems can be integrated with existing video surveillance systems, and some key management systems are compatible with existing identification card systems.

You may also want to ask vendors about the compatibility of other systems they offer, such as door exit alarms, fleet management, and asset or weapon lockers. Depending on your specific organizational needs, you may benefit from custom reports, additional features, or you may want to connect your key management system to other applications. But be sure to ask your vendor about added costs for customization and integration.

## 8 Investigate: Alarms and Reporting

Reporting options vary significantly by key control system. Make sure to find out how adaptable each system is to your particular reporting needs. Are the reports in a useful format? Can you export or distribute them?

Door-exit alarms and real-time alert notifications allow for a rapid response and virtually eliminate lost or stolen keys. Check which alarm options are available in the systems you are considering. Some key control systems can send automatic notifications and events to authorized personnel for enhanced control. Personnel can cancel an alarm and remotely disable user privileges if necessary. Automatic alarm notifications and email alerts can be created and sent to computers or smartphones as they occur. Check if each system allow for:

- Overdue sensitive key alarms (Key Curfew)
- Key access overrides
- Lockouts for excessive failed password entries

Real-time transaction logging means that every transaction is automatically recorded and compiled into usage logs. These logs include all changes to access and permission levels. Real-time reporting allows administrators to see at any given time which users have keys in their possession.



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## 9 Confirm Regulatory Reporting Requirements

In addition to operational reporting, if you're in a regulated industry, make sure that every single key control system you're considering meets your minimum compliance reporting threshold. This could include audit trails on all keys, key transactions, system alarms, or user transactions.

## 10 Plan for Growth

What may seem adequate today may be insufficient a year from now. The ability to add on just the exact components you need, or change modules where and when you need them, will help protect your investment. By planning for expansion now, you will avoid having to replace an entire, inadequate key control system later. Not only could you limit growth, but you could stifle entirely new business opportunities.

Consider the possibility of adding an asset management system with lockers to secure small electronics like smartphones, tablets, or other valuable items. If this becomes a requirement in the future, you'll benefit from selecting a vendor that can offer additional solutions that integrate with your new access control system.


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***Learn more about key control.***

**For assistance completing this checklist, or to learn more about selecting the right Key Management System for your organization, talk to a Key Tracer expert at 1-800-331-2882 or visit us online at www.keytracer.com.**

**Key Tracer is a leading provider of Key Management Systems, offering a full range of contactless and maintenance-free Key Control Systems and Asset Management solutions. Since 1989 Key Tracer has been the premier key management system integrator in many countries, solving key and asset security challenges for their customers. Key Tracer caters to the needs of thousands of clients in: Law Enforcement, Corrections, Gaming, Managing Fleets and Parking, Education, Hotels and Hospitality, Government, Museums, Retail Loss Prevention, Sports, Healthcare, and Air Travel.**