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Scanning the Crowd

ID scanners and age verification devices allow club owners to out-fake the fakers....

By Krista A. Briggs

Due to an increasing influx of underage visitors and problematic patrons, ID scanning devices, like those manufactured by California-based company CardCom Technology, are quickly becoming a necessity for nightclub owners, particularly those who are rightfully concerned about liquor license violations. While right-to-privacy proponents may dispute the legalities of such devices, for club owners and their counterparts in the hospitality industry, age verification can simply be a matter of survival.

Looks Aren't Everything

According to Richard Sirois, North American channel manager of CardCom, interest in ID scanners has recently become widespread. "We've been touching every vertical market," he said. "Let's start with the hospitality market - casinos, bars, nightclubs, restaurants, hotels - they have units and we've established them in different areas of the country, even in Canada. A lot of them are in nightclubs, in adult shops, or bars. So we're touching every market in which age sensitivity is a priority."

Club owners have a variety of devices to choose from. On the market are ID scanners that allow access to cash registers, doors, buildings, or elevators; fake ID detection devices; X-ray, infrared, and magnetic scanners used to detect movement or weaponry; bar code wand scanners; and even ultra-high tech devices that can scan the iris of an employee's eye for identity verification.

For club owners looking to install their first monitoring device, Sirois recommends CardCom's introductory model of their ViAge Verifier, the CAV-2000. "The CAV-2000 reads the magnetic stripe information on a driver license for North America," he explained. "When you swipe the license, it will show the age on a display screen. And if it's an expired license, it will show you that as well. If it's an altered or fraudulent driver's license, [the screen] might say 'error', or it might not have any information at all. So it can tell you that something is wrong." And with a file full of commendations and "thank yous" from law enforcement agencies across the county, CardCom can prove that their technology is working.

Kid Confrontations

So far, CardCom is reporting great success with the CAV-2000. "I was talking to one of our resellers the other day, and he was telling me about one of the ways he gets bar business," said Sirois. "He'll bring [a unit] up to a [bar owner] on a Friday, and he'll let him use it for that night, and when he comes back to pick it up the next day, the guy won't want to give it back. They really do make things a lot easier - they can stop confrontations with kids, or whoever."

The CAV-2000 can display basic information and is portable and light, but the model can't collect data to say, form a promotional database. That it leaves to its big sister, the CAV-3000. While most age verification units only scan magnetic striping or bar-coded driver's licenses, the CAV-3000 can read both. It also has the capability to read UPC bar codes, and can

be used as a scanner device when connected to a POS register. An imager can also be added, which will take a picture of an ID and save it.

A Computerized Witch Hunt?

Database building for promotional purposes, one of the side effects of ID scanning, can be beneficial to club owners, but depending on how the information is used, it can also present problems. Occasional club customers are deluged by flyers and brochures sent out by club promoters. And in one case, members of the NYPD tracked a rape suspect to his apartment after obtaining scanning records from a club that the man had allegedly patronized, lending credibility to the cries from civil rights activists of computerized witch hunt. But the benefit of having a full database of all your patrons, and the added security of knowing exactly who is in your club at any given time, might outweigh such concerns.

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