



Calvary Chapel Upgrades Access Control with Viscount Enterprise Freedom Access Control System to Protect Staff, Students and Visitors

Customer

Founded in 1985, Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale (CCFL) is an evangelical mega-church with more than 25,000 worshippers and nine regional campus locations across Florida. The main campus itself spans a 75-acre area with five buildings including Calvary Christian Academy, a pre-K to 12th grade school that serves 2,000 students. With more than 1,000 staff, volunteers, students, visitors and worshippers entering the campus throughout the week, CCFL has made access control a priority by investing in the Viscount Freedom access control system to safeguard against unauthorized individuals, protect users and reduce the risk of theft, vandalism and other crime.

The Challenge

With an access control system already in place, CCFL understood the importance of monitoring and controlling access to its facilities, but also recognized the need to upgrade to a more advanced solution based on more modern technology. "Our previous access control system was old and clunky, and the accompanying management software was no longer supported, so we knew it was time for something new," explained Benny Brown, Network Engineer, CCFL. After looking at several solutions, CCFL selected the Viscount Freedom access control platform because it is a feature-rich, server-based software application that communicates over IP. "The Freedom system stood out because it is a true IP-based system with a Web-based management interface and is built with the industry's latest technologies in a compact, energy-efficient form factor."

The Solution

CCFL replaced its existing access control system with Viscount Freedom, installing 100 readers and administering 1,270 regular cardholders. Readers also were installed in each elevator to restrict floor entry according to access authorization. CCFL purchased a Freedom RAID server to run the software and create a redundant system for high-priority areas using Freedom CUBE servers. The Freedom access control system was installed and configured to exact CCFL's control specifications, enabling ease of administration and central management from the System Administrator's office.



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A software-centric solution that takes physical control panels out of the equation, Freedom is also very easy to scale using the church's existing network framework. "With a central server and a bridge that is literally just a card reader and controller, Freedom is very simple to scale without having to set up separate databases for each location," stated Brown. "We plan to install Freedom Access Control in all of our buildings as soon as we can."

The Results

With a simplified system architecture and Web-based user interface, Brown finds the Freedom system very easy to use, offering the tools and flexibility needed to efficiently manage schedules, users and system updates. “The graphical user interface and screens are well organized, logical and very easy to navigate, resulting in a minimal learning curve,” said Brown, who also likes the fact that any card reader can be turned into an IP device by connecting it to the bridge to grant or deny access from anywhere. “Port-triggered actions enable us to make access changes to any door during special events if necessary.” With this feature, one card reader can lock, unlock or lockdown an entire building or floor in the event of an emergency. “With our old system, I would have to create a command file and reconfigure the system to accommodate any changes. Now, I can make these changes in less than five minutes.”

According to Brown, the Freedom system also is very easy to maintain for maximum performance. Because the control software and databases are hosted on servers, Brown does not have to install control firmware and a database on each access control panel as before. “If we need to replace or add a bridge, I simply enter it into the software and hit ‘copy and paste,’ so there is practically no programming involved,” noted Brown.

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The Freedom system also is very reliable, in part because it runs on CCFL’s existing network that already has fault tolerance and resiliency strategies in place. “We have had zero downtime and zero failures with the Freedom system — it runs very smoothly on our network without missing a beat,” claimed Brown. Redundancy is further enhanced because the system operates on servers with redundant power supplies, network connections and hard drive storage.

By providing real-time communication between the software and card readers, the Freedom Enterprise access control system has unquestionably improved security at CCFL campuses. With its old system, Brown had to push out changes to every controller and local database, often resulting in a lag in communication and leaving some entry points vulnerable to unauthorized access. “We would also experience a delay of up

to two hours during the controller initialization process, which added to the system’s vulnerability,” said Brown, who didn’t have much confidence in the old system. “Output from the old management software was sometimes inaccurate, claiming that a door was closed when in fact, it was actually open.” Brown had to reboot the entire system to fix these errors.

Because Freedom is so simple to install, operate and support, Brown has been able to save a significant amount of time managing access control. “I am saving several hours each week — time that I can spend focusing on more strategic tasks,” asserted Brown. “Once we are fully deployed, I believe Freedom will be a completely hands-free system.” Brown also saves significantly in support and maintenance costs. In fact, the Freedom system offers a substantial cost savings in general. “The initial investment costs were at least 30 percent less than the competition,” he added.

Brown has been very impressed with both the technology and people at Viscount. “I met a Viscount engineer several years ago at a tradeshow, long before I needed a new access control system, and we’ve kept in touch ever since,” explained Brown. “Eager to meet our needs, the Viscount team has been absolutely great to work with.”

In a time when the global landscape for security threats continues to grow, even places of worship have become the target of theft, vandalism, and in some cases, violent crime. Maintaining the safety of worshippers, visitors, staff and volunteers is a top priority for organizations like Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale, which has invested in the most advanced solutions available to protect its people and property. “The Freedom access control system is a simple, compact and energy-efficient IT-centric solution that is easy to use and scale to meet our increasing needs,” concluded Brown. “Offering advanced functionality, greater reliability, and cost-effectiveness, Freedom truly fit the bill.”

Key Benefits

- Easy to use and maintain, saves time
- Redundancy ensures maximum uptime
- Enhanced access control improves security
- Cost-effective
- Excellent support when required