

How To Select a Card System

When you make a decision to purchase an ID system there are many important factors to consider. Consider not only the current but also the future needs for your ID system. Too often organizations are short sighted and only look at the immediate need for a photo-ID card. Keep in mind that there may be other card related applications like access control, time and attendance, parking lot access, network authentication, vending and copy machine control and cashless cafeteria applications. All of these applications can be tied to a single ID-card with a little foresight. There is no need for people in your organization to carry multiple cards.

Here are a few important things to consider when buying an ID system:

Photo-ID Software is the heart of your system. The right software will allow you to accommodate all of your present and future ID card applications. Some versions of software allow you to retrieve and share relevant ID card data from existing databases over a LAN/WAN saving you time and eliminating errors from double data entry. Be sure that you know the types of databases that you want to share data with before you select your photo-ID software. Make sure that the photo-ID software that you purchase will allow you to interact with the databases for your access control, time and attendance or other card related systems of the present and future. The data you keep in your ID database can have many uses beyond the ID card. Standard and customizable report capabilities may provide benefits to you. You may also want remote users to be able to view some of the data in the ID database. Security guards as an example may need to verify the identity of an employee who has forgotten or lost his or her card.



Don't get tied to a proprietary photo-ID software package that is integrated into your access control or time and attendance system. Proprietary systems are typically single dimensional and designed to make you a captive of the vendor. Proprietary software is the biggest reason people carry multiple cards.

Some Photo-ID software packages are designed to be more intuitive making them easier to learn and easier to use. Even well designed software can be hard to learn without help. The more capabilities included with your Photo-ID software the more likely that you will want to purchase an on-site training package. A few hours of formal training can save you weeks of trial and error and help you learn to use all of the capabilities of your software package. Professional installation can help you create card formats and/or link data fields to existing databases. This can be important if you don't have the time or expertise.

If you anticipate possible requirements in the future for the capture and storage of biometrics or for smart card personalization make sure that your photo-ID software will allow you to accommodate those requirements. If the version of software that you buy does not have these capabilities make sure that there are inexpensive upgrade versions available. Some software packages can be stored on a central server allowing authorized remote work stations to access the software using a simple web browser to view, change or print ID data. You may want to move to a program like this in the future so make sure that there is an easy and inexpensive migration path from the software you buy.

It sounds confusing but one of our knowledgeable consultants can spend a few minutes discussing your requirements with you and help you select the best software for your present and future needs.

The Camera that you select is the single biggest contributor in determining the speed to create a photo-ID card and the quality of the photo. You might consider using a low cost digital camera or even a web cam to capture your photos. These cameras are typically inexpensive but the tradeoff is that they may be slow, require multiple steps to capture and download a photo into the photo-ID software, require some technical expertise to import image files into photo-ID software and usually don't provide sufficient control of lighting. These factors contribute to poor quality photos and very slow speeds to capture and print a photo-ID. If price is the most important factor for you and you can tolerate speed, complexity and quality issues consider one of these cameras. Make sure that you choose one that is Twain or Video for Windows compliant and has been tested and approved by the manufacturer of the photo-ID software you plan to use.



Automated one-step digital or video cameras provide a seamless and integrated process with the photo-ID software. These cameras are specifically designed for use with photo-ID software and automatically find and center the subject and crop the image in a matter of a few seconds instead of several minutes. Automated ID cameras usually include commercial grade flash attachments for more control of the lighting and a tripod and a backdrop with stand for more consistent photo backgrounds and better quality photos. No flash or a weak flash requires your subject to be very close to the camera. Commercial grade flash devices will allow a subject to be 10 feet or more from the camera with good results.

Saving a few minutes when capturing a photo and creating a card may not seem significant. However, if you have just ten people waiting for new ID cards, saving a few minutes each could cut the waiting time by 30 minutes. Always consider how many people you will need to accommodate at peak times when you make a decision on purchasing a camera.

We strongly suggest that you see a demonstration of the photo-ID system that you are considering for purchase before you buy it. Until you can experience the entire process of capturing and printing an ID card you cannot be sure that what you are buying will meet your needs.

The Card Printer is usually the most important factor in the reliability of the ID system, the durability and security of the card and the card technologies your system can support. While most people focus on the speed of the printer when making a purchase decision; that is probably one of the less important factors. The print speed of different printer models typically varies less than 15 seconds per card. It is more important that you decide the present and potential future physical characteristics of your ID card. Do you need to print on the front side of the card only or front and back? Do you need to encode a magnetic stripe or a smart card? Many printers cannot be upgraded in the field so make sure that if you think that you will ever need any of these capabilities in the future that you buy them today

Card durability is one of the most important considerations when selecting a printer. If you want the ID card to last several years or tolerate the constant abrasion of contact card readers you need a more durable card. Applying a polyester laminate over the printed area of the card will make it durable enough to tolerate significant surface abrasion. You must buy a printer with a laminator station if this is important to you. Printers with laminator stations can also apply a custom hologram for enhanced security.

Printers have the most mechanical components of any part of a photo-ID system and as such are most likely to experience downtime. The most popular brands of printers have become the most popular because they are the most reliable products. Buy one of the top brands and you won't be sorry. Today's card printers are much more reliable than those sold even a few years ago but they still break and usually when you need them most. Printers also break more frequently when they are not cleaned, adjusted and lubricated at regular intervals. A good on-site service program will include regular scheduled preventative maintenance. Unless you have the time to box up the printer and send it back to the factory whenever it has problems you should buy from a local dealer that offers on-site service and support.



Service and Support will be with you long after you have forgotten the price of your photo-ID system. Unless you have the time and expertise you probably will need help to set up your photo-ID-system, connect it to your network, establish database links and create card formats. On-site training to show you how to use all of the important features of your photo-ID software and hardware can save you dozens of hours trying to figure it out on your own and make your system productive from the beginning. On-site service instead of "send it back to the factory" service will allow you to use your photo-ID system every time you need it and assure you that when downtime occurs it is just for a few hours rather than a few weeks.

Make sure that the dealer that sells you your photo-ID system can provide on-site installation services, training, and service to assure that your photo-ID system will meet your needs from the beginning and throughout the years.

There is much to consider and decide before you buy your next photo-ID system. Making an uninformed decision can be costly and you may be forced to live with it for years. The only safe way to purchase a photo-ID system that will meet your needs is to see a demonstration of the actual software, camera and printer before you buy them. A good dealer will be happy to provide a no cost demonstration of equipment before you buy it. An hour of your time to see a demonstration will assure that you are getting what you need.

Diamond Business Service has many consultants with years of experience in the industry. One of them would be happy to meet with you to help you evaluate your needs and the best solution for those needs. We would then be happy to provide you with a demonstration of the products we recommend and the names of satisfied users with whom you can talk. There is no charge for this service and it will put you in a position to make an informed and confident buying decision.

