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Bologna Employees Get Streamlined Access from Texas Instruments TIRIS™

Responding to a new Italian law, the Poste Italiane E.P.E. post offices in Bologna, Italy recently completed installation of an innovative personnel access control system from Texas Instruments TIRIS™ and integrator Sintel van der Hoorn SRL.

It used to be a test of time and patience for employees going from one post office building to another in Bologna. First, the employee had to sign into the building where he or she worked. If the guard wasn't there to verify the employees presence, the employee waited. To go to one of the other seven post office buildings in Bologna, the employee had to first sign out of the first building, then repeat the sign-in procedure at the second building.

Time-consuming procedures such as this in the public sector, along with concerns about bombs and theft, prompted the Italian government to pass a new law requiring all public offices to develop progressive measures for tracking personnel.

TIRIS-Based Solution Easily Wins the Bid

In looking for a way to implement the new law, Ing. Donzelli, the Emilia Romagna regional post office manager, decided to hold a competition. Sintel van der Hoorn SRL, an Italian systems integrator, based their winning bid on a similar application that the company had developed for the Italian railways at the Termini Station in Rome. Says Donzelli: "The technology convinced us and we stayed within our budget!"

Employees Benefit from Instant Access

Radio frequency identification (RFID) technology is now used by the Bologna post offices to provide its 2000 employees with badges that contain unique identification numbers. When employees enter or exit post office buildings, they are automatically recognized by the TIRIS-

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based system. In fact, recognition is so fast that access to the building is immediate and hands-free—the employee does not have to stop or even swipe a card. Employees have access to as many—or as few—of the seven buildings as their clearance level permits. The result is the Italian government is experiencing unprecedented efficiencies in managing public employees.

How the System Works

Each post office building in Bologna now has a dedicated server to track personnel. Servers are linked using a geographical switched line. The master server, housed in the regional administrative office, coordinates the information flow among the servers. With regular updates, personnel can leave one post office building and enter another without being stopped by security guards. A brief maintenance is run on the servers daily late at night.

At each entrance, the system is integrated into a passageway that includes three photocells that recognize the direction of traffic and permit quick access. At the entrance to each building, terminals are mounted on a panel that encases the RFID antenna .

In and Out buttons are located beside the terminal's keyboard. The keyboard also allows the employee to enter the reason for entering or leaving if different from normal hours. Employees wear badges that include the RFID transponder. When either the In or Out button is pushed, the antenna picks up the signal emitted by the transponder and the employee's badge is read in less than half a millisecond. The transponder contains information that includes the unique ID of the badge holder as well as other information used in personnel management.

This information is temporarily stored on the server. The central computer is updated periodically by the servers.

Flexible and Productive

The RFID-based system, called TRP (Terminali Rilevazione Presenze), not only controls access to the buildings 24 hours a day, but also allows managers to determine in which building an employee is. Further, the system is flexible enough to limit access to the 200 employees who must work at night.

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Installation in all seven buildings took the phased approach so that Sintel could integrate the RFID automatic data capture with the Post Office's proprietary personnel management software. Those managing the servers, as well as secretaries assigned to tracking employees' hours, were also given some time to adapt their methodology to the new system. The first system was installed one year ago. No major problems have been encountered throughout the installation period.

The postal administration has already seen significant boosts in productivity because the system interfaces with the personnel management software. Several employees have been reassigned to other duties because the TIRIS system frees them from the paper-based operations.

Data on employee leaves, overtime, and ,of course, normal working hours is readily available to personnel administrators. Since post office employees are salaried employees who are eligible for overtime, each employee's hours can be automatically calculated and available immediately. No longer do clerks have to manually tally the log sheets from seven different buildings with multiple exits. Nor do they have to enter the data into the system.

Employees Treated Equally

The TRP system is a hand-free system that recognizes all types of post office employees. Employees are guaranteed non-preferential and equal treatment at the entrances. Another benefit of the system is that fewer employees are required to maintain security and to manage personnel data. Not only can the Bologna post offices track every employee while on the job, but management data and statistics are easily obtained. Employees require minimal training to use the transponders, especially since it is a hand-free system.

The TRP system provides a fast, very flexible, and precise system for the Bologna post offices.

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