

Big Brother: Security Devices

High-tech security devices guarantee all eyes are on residents and visitors.

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Residents at a Greenwich Village, N.Y., condo community say hello and goodbye to their doorman everyday as they pass through the building. But get this—they've never actually met the doorman. What's the catch? Entry control, delivery management, and security are all controlled by a high-tech system called Cyberdoorman, a touch-screen control panel connected to a 24-hour monitoring and security service via a network of cameras, intercoms, card access points, and alarms.

“Cyberdoorman functions exactly like a doorman,” says Tim Crowley, managing director of New York City-based FLAnk, which developed the eight-unit building, 135 West 4th Street. “Residents and visitors go up to the panel, and there's a human being at the control center who watches the building and interfaces with you.” The system grants or denies access to visitors and allows remote access to the building for deliveries and pickups. Packages are stored in a secured spot controlled remotely by Cyberdoorman.

The off-site system saves the building a large chunk of change—about \$14,000 a year—compared to the \$270,000 cost of hiring a round-the-clock doorman in New York, Crowley says. “A doorman in a typical residential building works about six minutes every hour,” he adds. “Someone very smart figured out that one person can watch six buildings at once.” Residents don't miss the human interaction, Crowley says. If they feel like saying hi to someone, they can via an intercom; if not, they are left alone and not bothered by a potentially pesky doorman.

This remote security system represents just one way to minimize security costs and maximize efficiencies. The new spate of products means that more and more security features at multifamily properties rely heavily on technology that sees, hears, scans, and speaks to residents without an ounce of face-to-face human interaction.

In Florida, Ft. Lauderdale-based Skyrise Development Group is turning to video recognition systems, which store residents' photos and grant access based on face recognition. Skyrise's president David Houry says the high-tech solution will one day surpass today's popular biometrics devices. “Video recognition is definitely going to be the future,” Houry says. “There is no other possibility because it's so easy to manage the security of a building. Residents just pass through the lobby, the camera recognizes you, and the door opens.” Houry is testing a video recognition security system at a handful of its Texas apartment communities but readily admits that a few kinks still need to be worked out since the technology is fairly new. Since video recognition is, on average, only 85 percent accurate today, the Texas apartments will offer a backup biometrics system. “If the video recognizes you, it will let you in,” Houry explains. “If it doesn't, then you have to use the biometrics device.” Though video recognition software is fairly expensive, running anywhere from \$80,000 to \$2 million without the hardware costs, like any technology, it's just a matter of time before the price drops, Houry says.