

BUYING GUIDE · 10 PAGES

How to Choose an Access Control Platform — The 2026 Checklist

A vendor-neutral checklist covering the 12 criteria that matter most — bilingual support, retrofit compatibility, audit trail, local technicians, and total cost of ownership.

10 pages · 10 min read · PDF

12 Criteria. One Score. Zero Guesswork.

Every access control vendor will tell you their platform is the modern one. The only way to tell them apart is to score them against the same fixed list of criteria — not whichever features they choose to highlight in their demo.

This checklist gives you 12 criteria organized into four groups: **resident experience**, **installation & infrastructure**, **operations & security**, and **business terms**. Walk through them with every vendor you evaluate, on the same call or site visit, and score each one Yes / Partial / No.

THE 12 CRITERIA AT A GLANCE

Resident Experience — 1. Native bilingual interface 2. QR + video intercom hybrid 3. Resident app with amenity booking

Installation & Infrastructure — 4. Retrofit compatibility 5. No new wiring at secondary points 6. Realistic installation timeline

Operations & Security — 7. Centralized, timestamped audit trail 8. Offline/failover behavior 9. Data retention & privacy policy

Business Terms — 10. Transparent total cost of ownership 11. Local technicians & support SLA 12. Flexible contract & exit terms

Turn the page for a full explanation of each criterion, why it matters, and the specific question to ask. Page 9 has a fillable scorecard for comparing up to three vendors side by side.

Criteria 1–3

1

Native bilingual interface

The resident app, visitor screens, and support documentation should be built bilingual from the start — not run through a translation plugin after launch. This matters daily for any property with a Spanish-dominant or otherwise non-English-speaking resident base.

Ask: "Show me the resident app in Spanish, live, right now."

2

QR + video intercom hybrid capability

A platform that only offers one entry method forces a compromise somewhere on your property. Look for a vendor that supports QR entry at secondary points and video intercom at the main entrance, managed from one dashboard.

Ask: "Can I run QR at my side gate and video intercom at my lobby, on the same account?"

3

Resident app with amenity booking and operations

Access alone isn't resident operations. Confirm the app also covers amenity reservations, maintenance tickets, package notifications, and community announcements — or you'll end up running a second platform anyway.

Ask: "What can a resident do in the app besides open the gate?"

Criteria 4–6

4

Retrofit compatibility

Most properties are not new construction. A platform that can only be sold as a full new build will price out anyone with existing wiring or gate operators worth preserving. Confirm the vendor has genuine retrofit experience, not just a willingness to quote one.

Ask: "Show me a case study of a retrofit on a property my age."

5

No new wiring required at secondary access points

This is the single biggest cost lever on a multi-gate property. If every secondary gate or visitor lane requires a hardware panel and wiring, your total cost of ownership climbs fast. QR-based secondary access should require nothing more than a printed plaque.

Ask: "What exactly do you install at a secondary gate with no existing wiring?"

6

Realistic installation timeline, confirmed by a reference

Every vendor's proposed timeline sounds reasonable in a sales deck. What matters is whether it held up on a real property. Always ask to speak with a past customer about actual installation time versus what they were promised.

Ask: "Can I call a customer who installed in the last six months?"

Criteria 7–9

7

Centralized, timestamped audit trail

When something goes wrong, the first question from a board, insurer, or attorney is "who had access, and can you prove it?" A platform without a centralized, exportable log turns that question into guesswork.

Ask: "Pull up a log of every entry at Gate 2 in the last 30 days, right now."

8

Defined offline / power-failure behavior

Every system eventually loses internet or power. What matters is whether the gate fails open, fails closed, or has a documented backup behavior — and whether that behavior is acceptable for your property's safety and security needs.

Ask: "What happens at the gate the moment the internet goes down?"

9

Clear data retention and privacy policy

Video footage and access logs are sensitive resident data. Get a straight answer on how long data is stored, who inside the vendor's organization can access it, and what happens to your data if you cancel the contract.

Ask: "If we cancel next year, what happens to our access history and video?"

Criteria 10–12

10 Transparent total cost of ownership

Hardware, per-door software fees, installation labor, and ongoing support should be itemized separately, not blended into a single number. A vendor unwilling to break out the number by access point is a vendor hoping you won't ask.

Ask: "Break this quote down by hardware, software, installation, and support."

11 Local technicians and a real support SLA

A support team in a distant time zone with no local presence is a real operational risk when a gate fails on a Friday night. Ask for a written response-time commitment and confirm whether technicians are actually local to your market.

Ask: "Who shows up in person if a gate fails, and how fast?"

12 Flexible contract and clear exit terms

Understand the contract term, hardware ownership after cancellation, and any penalties before you sign — not after. A confident vendor will show you these terms without being asked twice.

Ask: "Walk me through exactly what happens if we want to leave in year two."

7 Red Flags to Watch For

These are the patterns that show up again and again in vendor conversations that later become buyer's remorse. None of them are automatic disqualifiers on their own — but two or more together should slow you down.

- ✓ **A single blended price with no breakdown.** If a vendor won't itemize hardware, software, installation, and support separately, you can't compare them against anyone else.
- ✓ **No reference customer with a similar property type.** A logo wall isn't a reference. Insist on speaking to a property manager whose gate count and building age resemble yours.
- ✓ **Translation-plugin Spanish, not native bilingual.** Watch for a resident app where the Spanish version feels like an afterthought — awkward phrasing is the tell.
- ✓ **Vague answers about offline behavior.** If a vendor can't clearly state what happens to a gate when the internet drops, that's a gap you'll discover the hard way.
- ✓ **Pressure to sign before a proper site visit.** A vendor quoting a firm price without walking every gate in person hasn't actually assessed your property.
- ✓ **No answer on data ownership after cancellation.** If they can't tell you what happens to your access logs and video when the contract ends, assume the answer isn't in your favor.
- ✓ **Support based entirely outside your time zone or market.** Ask directly where the support team physically is, and what the real response time has been for existing customers — not the number in the brochure.

How to Score and Interpret Your Results

For each of the 12 criteria, score the vendor **Yes (2 points)**, **Partial (1 point)**, or **No (0 points)**. Add up the total out of 24 and use the scale below as a rough guide — treat it as a conversation starter with your board, not a strict pass/fail rule.

20–24	14–19	8–13	0–7
Strong fit — proceed to contract review	Workable — negotiate on the gaps	Significant gaps — proceed with caution	Poor fit — keep evaluating other vendors

Use the scorecard on the next page to run this same 12-point scoring exercise across every vendor you're seriously considering. Scoring them side by side, on paper, on the same call, removes most of the guesswork that a sales deck is designed to create.

A NOTE ON WEIGHTING

Not every criterion carries equal weight for every property. A single-entrance mid-rise may not care much about the QR + video hybrid criterion, while a five-gate community will weight it heavily. Adjust the scoring to reflect what actually matters for your building before you compare vendors.

Compare Up to Three Vendors

Criterion	Vendor A	Vendor B	Vendor C
1. Native bilingual interface			
2. QR + video intercom hybrid			
3. Amenity booking & resident ops			
4. Retrofit compatibility			
5. No new wiring at secondary points			
6. Realistic, reference-confirmed timeline			
7. Centralized, timestamped audit trail			
8. Defined offline/failover behavior			
9. Clear data retention & privacy policy			
10. Transparent total cost of ownership			
11. Local technicians & support SLA			
12. Flexible contract & exit terms			
Total (out of 24)			

Score each row 2 (Yes), 1 (Partial), or 0 (No). Print this page and bring it to your vendor calls, or fill it in digitally.

VIVO CONTROL

See How Vivo Control Scores on All 12 Criteria

Vivo Control was built around this exact checklist: native bilingual resident experience, QR and video intercom in one platform, retrofit-friendly deployment with no new wiring at secondary points, a centralized audit trail, and local Caribbean and LATAM support.

Book a Free Demo →

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