



— 2026 EDITION · ORANGE COUNTY

The OC Commercial **Buyer's Guide** to Access Control

What it costs, how the platforms compare, what the code requires, and how to pick an installer you will not regret. Written by the people who install it.

INSIDE

Real 2026 per-door pricing · PDK vs. Brivo vs. Verkada

Permits & egress · 10 installer questions

3 common buyer mistakes · Door worksheet & bid scorecard

Since 1984

Action 1st Loss Prevention, Inc.

— START HERE

Buying access control without the guesswork

Most businesses buy access control once every ten or fifteen years. The companies selling it do it every day. This guide is meant to close that gap, so you walk into your first bid meeting knowing what the numbers should look like and which questions matter.

We have installed and serviced commercial security in Orange County since 1984, from single-suite dental offices in Huntington Beach to warehouses and multi-tenant buildings in Irvine. The pricing here is what projects actually cost in this market in 2026, not a national average. Use it to check any quote you get, ours included.

THE SHORT VERSION

Budget \$3,000 to \$4,000 per door installed for a professional cloud-managed system, plus roughly \$10 to \$30 per door per month in software. A typical 4-door office lands between \$12,000 and \$16,000. The locking hardware on each door is the biggest variable, anything that changes how an exit door releases usually needs a permit, and you should own your system's admin account no matter who installs it.

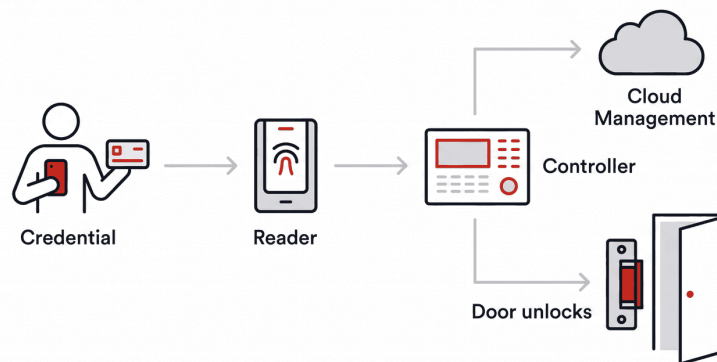
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— 01 · THE BASICS

How access control **actually** works

Every system, from a one-door keypad to a 200-door campus, is built from the same five parts. Knowing them makes any proposal readable.

How access control works



The five parts

- 1 Credential.** A card, fob, PIN, or phone. Mobile credentials are now standard on most new installs.
- 2 Reader.** Mounted by the door. It reads the credential and passes it to the controller.
- 3 Controller.** The box that decides yes or no. Good ones keep working when the internet drops.
- 4 Locking hardware.** Electric strike, mag-lock, or electrified exit device. The biggest price variable.
- 5 Software.** Where you add people, set schedules, and read the logs. Cloud or on a local server.

Three kinds of systems

STANDALONE

A keypad or smart lock that manages itself. Fine for one interior door with low turnover. No central logs, no remote control.

ON-PREMISE

Software on a server or PC in your building. Little or no monthly fee, but you own the server, the updates, and most changes mean a service call.

CLOUD-MANAGED

Controllers on site, management in a web portal and phone app. Monthly per-door fee. Remote unlock, instant revocation, automatic updates.

— 02 · PRICING

What it costs in Orange County

Installed prices for typical Orange County commercial retrofits in 2026, including hardware, licensed low-voltage labor, programming, and basic training.

SYSTEM TYPE	INSTALLED PER DOOR	MONTHLY SOFTWARE	BEST FIT
Standalone keypad / smart lock	\$2,000 to \$3,000	\$0 to \$10	Single interior door, low turnover
On-premise card access	\$3,000 to \$4,000	\$0 to minimal	Single site, stable staff, IT on hand
Cloud-managed (PDK, Brivo, Verkada)	\$3,000 to \$4,000	\$10 to \$30 / door	Most businesses, multi-site, remote management
Complex doors (mag-lock egress, delayed egress, elevators, gates)	\$3,500 to \$6,000+	varies	Code-driven or specialty openings

The four cost layers on every door

When two quotes for the same building differ by thousands, the difference is almost always hiding in one of these.

READER

Roughly \$150 to \$600 per door. Mobile-capable multi-technology readers sit at the top of that range.

LOCKING HARDWARE

The wildcard. Reusing an existing electric strike can cost nothing. A new electrified exit device on a storefront or fire-rated door can run \$1,000 to \$2,500 in hardware alone.

CONTROLLER & WIRING

The panel plus cable back to your IT closet. Long conduit runs, plenum cable, and hard-lid ceilings add labor hours fast.

SOFTWARE & SETUP

Licensing, plus the programming: schedules, access groups, credential enrollment, lockdown plans, integrations.

Worked example: a 4-door office. Front entry on an aluminum storefront, a rear door, a server closet, and a suite door. Installed cost lands between **\$12,000 and \$16,000**, plus about **\$40 to \$120 a month** in cloud licensing. Where it falls in that band depends mostly on the storefront door and whether any existing strikes can be reused.

Ranges are typical, not quotes. Public works at prevailing wage and new-construction rough-ins price differently. Full breakdown: action1st.com/resources/commercial-access-control-cost-guide/

— 03 · THE RECURRING QUESTION

Cloud vs. on-premise: where the money differs

At 2026 prices, cloud and on-premise cost about the same to install. The install invoice will not make this decision for you. What happens after the installer leaves will.

	CLOUD-MANAGED	ON-PREMISE
Install, per door	\$3,000 to \$4,000	\$3,000 to \$4,000
Recurring software	\$10 to \$30 per door per month	Little or none
4 doors over 5 years	About \$2,400 to \$7,200 in licensing	Server hardware, updates, and IT time
Adding a badge or changing a schedule	From a phone, in a minute	At the server, or a service call
Terminated employee	Revoked instantly, from anywhere	Revoked when someone gets to the server
Updates and security patches	Pushed by the platform	Your job, or your IT provider's
Internet outage	Doors keep working; remote management pauses	Doors keep working

On-premise still pencils out when...

- You have one site and do not plan to add another.
- Staff turnover is low, so the badge list rarely changes.
- You have capable IT on staff to own the server and updates.
- You already run a working on-prem system that is not end-of-life.

Cloud is the better fit when...

- You have more than one location, or plan to.
- People come and go often: retail, healthcare, property management.
- Nobody on staff wants to babysit a server.
- You want remote unlock, alerts, and logs on your phone.

OUR TAKE

Most of our 2026 Orange County installs are cloud-managed. The subscription buys capability owners actually use, not just hosting. But if you fit the on-premise list above, say so, and make every bidder price both.

04 · PLATFORMS

PDK vs. Brivo vs. Verkada

Three good cloud platforms that are genuinely different underneath. We install all three. PDK (ProdataKey) is our most common install, so read this knowing that.

	PDK (PRODATAKEY)	BRIVO	VERKADA
Best for	Most commercial buildings; growing door counts	Mixed vendor stacks; heavy integration needs	Buying doors and cameras at the same time
Software cost	Quoted per project	From about \$13.50 / door / month	Door licenses, commonly \$249 / yr or \$599 / 3 yr
Credentials	Smartcard, 125 kHz prox, and mobile on one reader	Cards and mobile, Apple and Google Wallet	Cards and mobile, tied to the Verkada app
Adding doors	Add an expansion controller; simplest of the three	Straightforward, panel dependent	Straightforward, at Verkada hardware prices
Cameras	Bring your own; no preferred brand	Integrates with several VMS platforms	Native, and the main reason to buy it
Watch out for	Shorter integration list	Feature tiers add up as you climb	Hardware and licensing both carry a premium

Brivo and Verkada figures are publicly listed starting points as of 2026 and move with size, term, and tier. Hardware and labor are separate.

PICK PDK WHEN

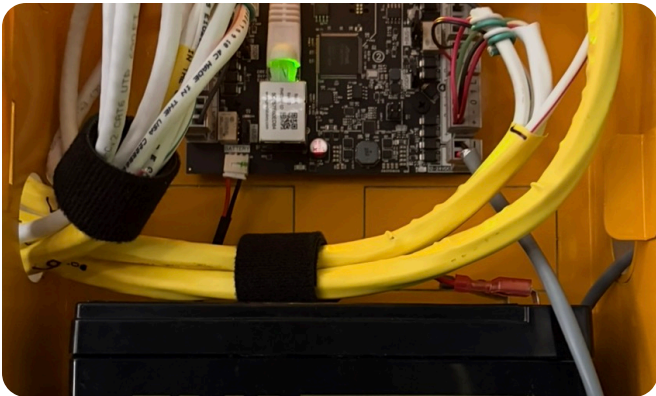
You want to keep existing prox cards working on day one, expect to add doors, and want to choose your own cameras.

PICK BRIVO WHEN

Doors need to talk to an HR system, a specific visitor product, or an unusual building stack. Its integration library is deeper.

PICK VERKADA WHEN

You are replacing cameras and doors together and one dashboard for both is worth a premium to you.



A PDK controller we installed and wired in Orange County.

WHAT ACTUALLY DECIDES IT

Your door hardware and who administers the system day to day matter more than the feature chart. Switching platforms later costs roughly 40 to 60 percent of a fresh install, because controllers and readers usually do not carry over. The first choice deserves a real conversation.

— 05 · BEFORE YOU CALL ANYONE

Plan your doors **first**

Thirty minutes with a clipboard makes every bid faster, cheaper, and easier to compare. Walk the building and note these five things.

- ☐ **Which doors** actually need control. Exterior entries, server and IT rooms, stock and cash rooms. Most interior offices do not.
- ☐ **What each door is made of:** wood, hollow metal, or aluminum and glass. This drives cost more than anything else.
- ☐ **Which doors are fire exits.** Those carry code requirements and usually a permit.
- ☐ **How many people** need access, and how often that list changes.
- ☐ **Own or lease?** Landlords often dictate who can do the work and require drawings.

Door worksheet

DOOR	LOCATION / PURPOSE	MATERIAL	FIRE EXIT?	EXISTING HARDWARE	WHO NEEDS IN, AND WHEN
Example	Front entry	Alum. storefront	Yes	Key only	All staff, 7a to 6p
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					

BRING A CARD TO THE SURVEY

If you already have badges or fobs, hand one to each bidder and ask them to identify the format. Standard 125 kHz prox and 13.56 MHz smartcards can often be kept. Proprietary formats may mean re-badging everyone, and you want to know that before you sign.

— 06 · THE FINE PRINT

Codes, permits & compliance

Anything that changes how an exit door latches or releases touches California building and fire code. This is where cheap installs turn into expensive fixes.

What usually needs a permit

- Electromagnetic locks (mag-locks) on doors in the path of egress.
- Delayed egress hardware.
- Electrified exit devices and strikes on exit doors.
- Anything tied into the fire alarm to release doors.

Most Orange County cities require a permit and a fire marshal sign-off for this work. Budget roughly \$500 to \$1,500 in permit-related cost on code-touching doors. Your installer should pull the permit as part of the job, not leave it to you.



Mag-locks on double glass doors: exactly the kind of opening that needs permits and a fire alarm tie-in.

Fail-safe vs. fail-secure

Fail-safe hardware unlocks when power is lost. **Fail-secure** stays locked. Which one a door needs depends on its role in egress and fire code, and a good installer will explain the choice door by door, in writing.

THE FIX WE GET CALLED FOR MOST

Unpermitted mag-lock installs. They work fine until an inspection, a fire alarm test, or an insurance review. If a bidder says you "probably don't need a permit," ask them to put that in writing.

Industry rules worth knowing

MEDICAL & DENTAL

The HIPAA Security Rule includes facility access controls. Its implementation specs are "addressable," which means you document what you did and why, not that you can skip it.

INSURANCE

Renewal questionnaires increasingly ask how entries are controlled and how access is revoked. Some policies carry conditions that a named security system stay operational.

LEASED SPACE

Landlords often require licensed, insured contractors, drawings, and after-hours work windows. Read your lease before you take bids.

This page is general guidance from an installer, not legal, code, or insurance advice. Requirements vary by city, building, and occupancy.

— 07 · VETTING BIDDERS

Ten questions for **every** installer

A good installer answers all ten without flinching. A weak one gets vague around question three, and that vagueness is the most useful thing you will learn all day.

- 1 What California licenses do you hold?** Expect a C-7 or C-10 from the CSLB, plus an Alarm Company Operator license if they do alarms. Verify at cslb.ca.gov.
- 2 Will you send a certificate of insurance?** General liability and workers' comp, naming you as certificate holder.
- 3 OSDP or Wiegand wiring?** OSDP is supervised and supports encryption. Wiegand is legacy and easy to skim.
- 4 Is locking hardware included for every door?** Get it per door, in writing. This is where quotes diverge by thousands.
- 5 Who pulls the permits?** The answer should be "we do."
- 6 What does the software cost in year three?** Intro pricing and the tier you actually need are often different numbers.
- 7 Who owns the admin account?** You should, including your credential data, if you ever change installers.
- 8 What happens when the internet goes down?** Doors should keep working on cached credentials.
- 9 What is the warranty on labor and wiring?** Most failures are hardware and wiring, not software.
- 10 How fast do you respond to a service call?** Get response time in writing, and ask what counts as an emergency.

RED FLAGS THAT SHOULD END THE MEETING

- ✗ A per-door price over the phone without anyone seeing the doors.
- ✗ No mention of fire code on a job that touches exit doors.
- ✗ Resistance to sending an insurance certificate.
- ✗ "We work under a partner's license."
- ✗ A proposal with no line for programming or training.
- ✗ The installer keeps the admin account "for support."



Recent Action 1st installs in Orange County: a fob reader on a glass suite door, a three-door panel with its power supply, and an electrified mortise lock.

— 08 · LEARN FROM OTHER PEOPLE'S PROJECTS

The 3 most common **buyer mistakes**

After four decades of fixing other people's installs, the same three mistakes account for most of the messes we inherit.

1

Comparing bids on the total, not the scope

Two quotes for "four doors" can describe two very different jobs. One includes a new electrified exit device on the storefront, the other assumes the existing strike works. One includes permits and programming, the other does not. The cheaper bid often becomes the more expensive project through change orders.

Fix: give every bidder the same door list (use the worksheet on page 7) and ask for pricing per door, with locking hardware, permits, programming, and training as separate lines. Then compare line by line with the scorecard on page 11.

2

Treating exit doors like any other door

Mag-locks and electrified hardware on exit doors are governed by building and fire code. Skipping the permit saves a few weeks and a few hundred dollars, right up until a fire inspection, an alarm test, or an insurance review finds it. Then the door gets redone, sometimes at a higher cost than doing it right the first time.

Fix: ask each bidder which of your doors are code-touching, what hardware they will use there, and who pulls the permit. Get the answer in writing.

3

Buying on the intro price and not owning the system

A low first-year software price can hide the tier you actually need. And some installers keep the admin account, or use proprietary credentials, so leaving them means re-badging everyone or replacing hardware. By then switching costs 40 to 60 percent of a new install.

Fix: ask for the year-three software cost for the tier that includes your must-have features, confirm in the contract that you own the admin account and your data, and prefer open hardware and standard credential formats.

— 09 · COMPARE QUOTES

Bid comparison scorecard

Print this page and fill in one column per bidder. If a bid leaves a line blank, that is your first follow-up question.

LINE ITEM	BIDDER A	BIDDER B	BIDDER C
Company & CSLB license #			
Insurance certificate received			
Platform proposed			
Number of doors priced			
Locking hardware, per door			
Readers & credential type			
OSDP or Wiegand			
Permits included? Who pulls them?			
Fire alarm tie-in included?			
Programming & training			
Total installed price			
Software: year 1 / year 3, per month			
Spare controller capacity (doors)			
Labor & wiring warranty			
Service response time (in writing)			
We own the admin account & data?			
Install timeline			

GET TWO OR THREE BIDS

We say that as one of the companies you would be getting a quote from. The differences between bids will hand you your follow-up questions, as long as everyone prices the same door list and the same platform tier.

Get a real number for your building.

Everything in this guide gets more useful once someone has walked your doors. We do that for free, and put a door-by-door quote in writing, usually within 48 hours.

What the survey covers

- Every door you want controlled, and the hardware each one needs
- Which openings touch fire code, and what the permit path looks like
- Whether your existing cards, strikes, and wiring can be reused
- Cloud vs. on-premise priced side by side if it is close

Why Action 1st

- Orange County commercial security since 1984
- Access control, video surveillance, locksmith, and door repair under one roof
- PDK, Brivo, and Verkada installs; we recommend what fits
- You own your system and your admin account

CALL US

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Mon to Fri, 8:30am to 4:30pm

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