How to get your commercial property ready for an access control upgrade

Why preparation matters for a commercial lock upgrade

Upgrading locks on a commercial property is rarely as simple as swapping out a residential deadbolt. The stakes are higher: you are managing multiple users, controlling entry at different times of day, and often meeting insurance or compliance requirements. Whether you are moving to a full electronic access control system or just upgrading to a more robust mechanical lock, the work you do before the technician arrives can make the difference between a smooth installation and a drawn-out headache. This article walks through the key steps to prepare a commercial property for a lock upgrade, so the job goes efficiently and the final system works as intended.

Step 1: Audit what you have now

Before any new hardware is ordered, you need a clear picture of the current setup. Walk every door that will be affected and note the following:

- Door type and material: wooden, metal, glass storefront, or hollow metal frame. Different materials require different cylinders, strikes, and reinforcing plates.
- Existing hardware: is the current lock a bored cylindrical lock, a mortise lock, a rim lock with panic hardware, or something custom? The new system must be compatible or the door prep must be changed.
- Handing: whether the door is left-handed or right-handed, inswing or outswing. This determines how the lock and strike are installed.
- Condition of the door and frame: rot, rust, bent hinges, or a sagging frame will stop a new lock from working correctly. Repair these issues before the upgrade.

Make a simple spreadsheet or a list on paper. Include any special doors such as warehouse entrances with heavy traffic, storefront doors with glass panels, or doors that are part of a fire-rated assembly. Fire-rated doors have strict rules about what hardware can be installed and how holes must be patched. Your technician will need to know about these early.

Step 2: Define your access needs

A lock upgrade is an opportunity to rethink who goes where and when. Sit down with whoever manages the property and list the requirements. For example:

- Which doors should be accessible to all employees during business hours but locked after hours?
- Are there any doors that need to remain unlocked from the inside for emergency exit (panic hardware)?
- Do you need a master key system so the building manager can open any lock while each tenant has a unique key?
- Will the system need to integrate with a time clock, intercom, or remote monitoring?

Write these requirements down. They will guide decisions about cylinder type, credential type (key, fob, pin code, or mobile app), and whether you need a wired or wireless system. Being clear about needs also helps the technician recommend the right parts on the first visit, avoiding returns and delays.

Step 3: Measure and check door prep

Commercial lock hardware comes in standard sizes, but door prep can vary. The backset (distance from the edge of the door to the center of the bore), bore diameter, and latch size all matter. If you are replacing an existing lock with a similar type, the new hardware may fit the existing holes. But if you are switching from a mechanical lock to an electronic access control system, the preparation is often different.



Check the following measurements on every door:

- Backset: usually 2 3/8 inches or 2 3/4 inches on commercial doors. Some older doors may be different.
- Cross bore diameter: the large hole in the door face. Electronic locks often need a larger bore or an additional hole for wiring.
- Edge bore diameter: the hole on the edge of the door for the latch. This must match the new latch size.
- Strike preparation: the hole in the frame for the latch or deadbolt. Electric strikes require a specific cutout and wiring to the frame.

If the door is a storefront door, note whether it has a narrow stile (the vertical frame piece on the glass side). Narrow stiles limit the types of locks that can be installed. Similarly, panic hardware on exit doors has its own set of dimensions and required clearances. Measuring now prevents ordering the wrong parts.

Step 4: Check power and wiring requirements

An electronic access control system needs power at each door. Some locks use batteries, which simplifies installation but requires periodic battery changes. Others are wired to a low-voltage power supply or a network. If you are going with a wired system, you need to know where the power source is and how to run cables to each door. Consider the following:

- Is there an existing power drop near the door? If not, plan for a new one. Running conduit or fishing wires through walls is best done before the lock upgrade day.
- Do you need a data cable (Cat5e or Cat6) for network-connected locks? This may need to be run alongside the power cable.
- For electric strikes or magnetic locks, the door frame may need to be drilled for wiring. This is usually done by the locksmith or a low-voltage electrician.

If you are not sure about your building's electrical layout, have a technician assess it. The last thing you want is to discover on installation day that the nearest outlet is too far away or that the door frame is solid steel and cannot be easily drilled.

Step 5: Organize your key inventory and cylinder records

An upgrade is a good time to clean up key control. Gather all existing keys for the property and identify which keys work which locks. Often, businesses have accumulated a drawer full of unmarked keys. Label them or set them aside. If you are moving to a master key system, the locksmith will need to know the hierarchy: which keys should open all doors, which should open only certain areas, and whether there are tenant-specific keys.

Also, gather any documentation about existing cylinders, such as key codes or keyways. This helps the technician avoid duplicating old systems by accident. If you have lost keys or suspect that keys are in the hands of former employees, now is the time to rekey. Rekeying all cylinders to a new key system is straightforward if done during the upgrade, but expensive if done later as a separate job.

Step 6: Communicate with building occupants

An upgrade affects everyone who uses the building. Tenants, employees, cleaning crews, and delivery people all need to know about the change. Send a notice a week before the work

begins. Explain that locks will be changed on a specific date, and that new keys or credentials will be issued. Ask occupants to return any old keys by a deadline. This prevents confusion and reduces the number of lockout calls after the upgrade.

If the upgrade involves electronic access control, schedule time to enroll each user's credential. This can take longer than expected if you have many users. Plan for a staggered rollout: issue new credentials to a pilot group first, then to everyone else once the system is stable.



Step 7: Clear the work area and provide access

On the day of the upgrade, make sure the technician can reach every door without obstacles. Move furniture, boxes, or equipment away from doors. If the door is inside a tenant space, coordinate with the tenant to allow entry. For exterior doors, ensure the technician has a way to lock and unlock the building while working. You may need to be present at the start and end of the day to secure the property.

Also, have a plan for handling doors that must remain functional during the upgrade. For example, you might schedule the work on a weekend or after hours. If that is not possible, upgrade one door at a time so the rest of the building stays secure.

Step 8: Test everything before finalizing

Once the hardware is installed, do not just hand over the keys and call it done. Walk each door with the technician. Test that the lock operates smoothly, that the latch aligns with the strike, and that any electronic credential works reliably. Check that panic hardware releases freely and that no door binds. If the system includes a master key, test each level of the hierarchy. This is your chance to catch issues while the technician is still on site.

For electronic systems, test the system under different conditions: what happens when the battery is low? Does the lock fail secure (locked) or fail safe (unlocked)? Know the answer and make sure it matches your security policy. Also, test any remote access or monitoring features before the technician leaves.

Step 9: Keep records and plan for future maintenance

After the upgrade, store all documentation in a safe place. This includes key codes, cylinder serial numbers, wiring diagrams, user manuals, and warranty information. If you have a master key system, keep a record of the key cuts and the hierarchy. A good record makes future rekeying or expansion much easier.

Also, set a schedule for periodic maintenance. Mechanical locks benefit from annual lubrication and adjustment. Electronic locks need battery checks and firmware updates. If your property has high-traffic doors, inspect them more often. A small investment in maintenance prevents small problems from turning into lockouts or security gaps.

When you need professional help with an access control service, it helps to have all this preparation done. A locksmith can then focus on the installation rather than firefighting. For commercial lock upgrades in Toronto and the GTA, many property managers turn to qalocksmith.com for reliable mobile service. Having your building ready before they arrive makes their work faster and more accurate.

What to watch out for at each step

Every step above has a common pitfall. During the audit, do not overlook doors that are rarely used but still on the same key system. They can cause problems later if they are forgotten. When defining access needs, avoid overcomplicating the hierarchy. Too many levels of master keying can weaken security and make rekeying expensive. When measuring, remember that doors and frames settle over time. A measurement taken today may differ from the blueprint. Check each door individually rather than assuming all doors are identical.



For power and wiring, be aware that old buildings may have asbestos in walls or ceilings. Drilling or fishing wires in such buildings requires special precautions. Communicate with the technician about any known hazards. When organizing keys, do not throw away old keys until

the new system is fully tested. You might need them as a fallback. When communicating with occupants, expect some resistance. People do not like change. Give them ample notice and a clear reason for the upgrade. When clearing the work area, remember that the technician may need access to the door's interior side as well. If the door opens into a storage room full of boxes, that room needs to be accessible.

Finally, when testing, be thorough. A lock that works perfectly nine times out of ten is not acceptable for a security door. Test it at least ten times from both sides. If it ever fails, address the issue before the technician leaves.

Preparing a commercial property for a lock upgrade takes time, but it pays off in a faster installation, fewer callbacks, and a system that actually serves your security needs. The work you do before the technician arrives is just as important as the installation itself. For a smooth upgrade, consider working with a qualified access control service provider who can guide you through the specifics of your building. One such resource for commercial properties is qalocksmith.com, which offers mobile service across Toronto and the GTA. With your building prepared and your requirements clear, the upgrade becomes a straightforward project rather than a stressful ordeal.