Effective filters or expensive barriers?

If I came to visit your company, how many security and administrative procedures would I need to go through?

If your setup is similar to that of most organisations, it would take me anything between fifteen minutes and half an hour from the time I arrive at the gate to when I actually get to see you. (That is if there is no waiting time and if the receptionist wasn't busy on a phone call when I walked in).

How effective are your security and reception functions?

By then I will have completed a register and a visitors' form at security and another register at reception. Both the security guard and the receptionist would have phoned you to let you know that I am there (or check that you are actually expecting me!).

What intrigues me though is that in many companies, the security guard and the receptionist seem to do little else but ensure that visitors complete paperwork and call the host. In his book "Legacide", Richard Mulholland challenges the legacy of needing a receptionist (he is even more irritated by the desk that they sit behind). But he doesn't suggest that they should be fired; instead promote them to "concierge" or "first impressions officer".

 In the same way I am not suggesting that security and reception be done away with completely. But there are surely more creative ways that we can keep our people and assets safe and welcome visitors to the company. Some of the different ways I have come across are:

- One client has a reception area with no receptionist; just a telephone and a list of extensions. So you can phone the person you are visiting directly. And if you can't get hold of them, there is an alternative number for a staff member who is allocated the task of then assisting you (a part-time receptionist if you like). She spends about two hours a month on reception duties.
- Another has a boom that opens when you enter the visitors' car park, and you can only leave when you have been issued with a token to open the boom on departure. There is no security guard to meet you.

- Most visitors are repeat visitors. Some companies save time by capturing the visitor's data in their computer system on the first visit. On subsequent visits, you can just call out your identity number and they will have a visitor's access card for you in less than half a minute.

So here is a challenge for you. Review your reception and security functions, and see if you can:

- Design entry and exit so that visitors can find their way without personal instruction and still feel welcome
- Get visitors to their hosts within five minutes (more or less, depending on the physical layout) of arriving at the gate to your premises
- Make reception and security part of the responsibilities that people have without it being a full-time position
- Encourage those responsible to think of better ways of carrying out the function

You will handle visitors more efficiently and use your staff more effectively. But best of all, visitors will be impressed and leave with a positive impression of your company.