

Immigration Goes Online

Thousands of immigrants who need to file papers related to immigration status, green cards, and resident cards no longer have to stand in line for hours on end. The immigration office now has a new system called Info Pass. Applicants simply schedule a time and a date to meet with an immigration officer using Info Pass. They don't even have to go to the immigration office. Info Pass is a website that they can access on their home computer or a library computer.

To beat the crowds, immigrants in Los Angeles used to get in line the night before. They would start lining up outside the building at 6:00 p.m. and spend the night in the cold or, occasionally, in the rain. By the following morning, there might be 200 people in line. This, of course, was an unpleasant surprise to people who thought they were early birds by arriving at 7:00 a.m. Sometimes people would sell their place in line to others for \$50 or more.

Where there are lines, there are vendors. No one had to worry about going hungry in line because of the variety of hot and cold food and drinks being sold all night long. Occasionally the police received reports about people being pickpocketed while waiting in the overnight lines. But such reports were rare. Many immigrants prefer not to get involved with police for fear of being sent back to their native country.

With the new system, people with appointments are in and out of the building within an hour. Applicants show up 15 minutes before their appointment time. Things are so efficient now that about 120 applicants per hour can be processed through the immigration office. Before Info Pass, it was about 40 people an hour.