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### Pointing the finger at biometrics

By Jon Boroshok, Contributing Writer  
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Fingerprint sensors on devices from cell phones to PCs and printers were on display at the 2005 Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas this month as vendors began to push "convenience-based security."

Salt Lake City's silex technology america Inc. was touting SecurePrint, a new technology that allows companies to restrict access to printers and documents to authorized users only.

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Gary Bradt, VP of the biometrics division, said the product was inspired by HIPAA and Sarbanes-Oxley Act requirements. "People are uneasy about running down to a printer and grabbing stuff before anyone sees it," explained Bradt. He cited shared printer access and competition between coworkers as a driving force behind the demand for printer privacy and security.

A silex algorithm creates a unique pattern of data points taken from each

fingerprint. A network printer and a PC with biometric fingerprint scanners can allow enrolled/authorized individuals to send a document to the printer but delay the print job until the sender again touches a fingerprint reader on the printer. Once this is done, all the users' queued documents print, creating what silex calls "my eyes only" privacy.

The company is targeting SecurePoint at human resources, banking, government, legal and financial companies. "There's a need to protect confidentiality and intellectual property," Bradt said.

Melbourne, Fla.-based AuthenTec demonstrated biometrically enabled PCs, cell phones and peripherals. Although there are a limited number of PCs equipped with fingerprint sensors now on the U.S. market, and no biometric-enabled cell phones currently available to American consumers, Art Stewart, the vice president of business development, sees increasing demand.

He said a big part of biometrics' appeal is convenience. The security is centered around the multitude of passwords individuals need to manage on a daily basis. Using the small, integrated sensors coupled with applications residing on a PC or mobile phone, a consumer can either touch the sensor, or perform a simple swipe, and the application will apply the password.

AuthenTec demonstrated at the show with a laptop computer using its own brand of fingerprint sensors with OmniPass, a password management program from Softex of Austin, Texas. It stores passwords in an encrypted vault until an authorized user touches the fingerprint sensor to validate his identity and request that the proper username and password be applied to the site or program requesting authorized access.

AuthenTec's Web site said its technology addresses the issue of difficult-to-image fingers, those with surface damage caused by daily activities. "TruePrint Technology uses a patented radio frequency (RF) imaging technique that allows the sensor to generate an image of the shape of the live layer of the skin that is buried beneath the surface of the finger. This live subsurface layer has the shape of the fingerprint ridge and valley pattern, in fact it is the source of the fingerprint pattern, and it is rarely affected by damage or wear to the finger surface."

AuthenTec's AES3500 is the smallest fingerprint touch sensor on the market today, the company states. It was first integrated onto an NTT DoCoMo cell phone in Japan two years ago. Japanese adoption has been strong, says Stewart. Fujitsu is using it now, and there has been success in Korea with LG Telecom. NTT DoCoMo supports applications in which the sensor is used to protect point-of-sale purchasing. It operates like a smart card, debiting an account at the time of purchase. The phone is also used to protect personal and business files, perform purchases, advanced check in (airports and hotels) and more. It's also an e-wallet. The consumer simply swipes a sensor, and then waves it over a reader.

The demand for such devices is high. A recent survey sponsored by AuthenTec showed that 71% of U.S. consumers would pay more for biometric security options in their cell phones and 63% feel the same about their PCs. Plus, today's fingerprint sensors aren't just about security. They can be used to quickly power on/power off devices, to customize program launches to correspond with individual fingers, and for graphical navigation -- especially important for cell phone gamers.

"It adds a level of security that can protect information and be compliant with network policy, without encumbering users," Stewart said.

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