

Standards Will Boost Biometrics Use

A new report says sales of biometrics technology could top \$1 billion by 2007 -- if the industry can agree on standards.

Nov. 13, 2002 - Many experts thought the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11 would give the biometrics industry a dramatic lift. While interest in a variety of technologies, including fingerprint, iris, and hand scanning – has grown, sales have not.

Sales of biometrics technology are expected to reach just \$153 million by the end of next year, says a new report by Allied Business Intelligence, a technology research company based in Oyster Bay, New York.

However, the industry is moving toward adoption of standards, which will make it possible to purchase retinal and fingerprint scanners from different suppliers and have the two systems work together. That could boost sales to \$300 million in 2004 and move the industry toward the billion-dollar mark by 2007.

"Biometrics is clearly the wave of the future in security," says John Chang, the ABI senior analyst who wrote the report. "It's just a matter of how fast it is adopted.

The report, "Biometrics Systems: Worldwide Deployments, Market Drivers, and Major Players," says fingerprint technology dominates the biometrics market today, with 36 percent of sales. Hand geometry and iris scanning systems are second and third with 27 percent and 16 percent respectively. Facial recognition, which has gotten most of the press, has 11 percent of the market and voice and dynamic signature scanning technology have 6 and 5 percent respectively.

So far, the most common application for biometrics technology is time and attendance systems. Companies are expected to spend \$17.4 million on such applications this year, while government agencies will spend more than \$16 million. Airport security lags behind with less than \$8 million in biometrics purchases.

In addition to the lack of standards, other issues hindering adoption include concerns about the accuracy of the systems and the ability of companies to respond to problems. Fingerprint technology is often accurate better than 99 percent of the time. But if someone cuts their finger, or if there is dirt or scratches on the scanner, the system won't work.

That can be a problem for companies that want to implement biometrics access control systems. If the system won't admit someone, then a security guard must check their identification personally, or video equipment must be installed so security staff can provide access remotely. That, of course, increases the cost of the system.

Chang says there is a move among companies to put biometrics on an RFID-enabled smart card, which can then be used for a number of applications. So-called contactless smart cards are convenient because they need only be waved near a reader. They can be used to provide authorized access to a specific individual to a building, a computer network or equipment.

"We are definitely seeing the convergence of RFID and smart card chip vendors with biometrics technology vendors," he says.

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