

Biometric Technology Is Here

Biometric technology can ensure security in several retail processes.

by Raymond J. Fry

When most people think of biometrics, they think about high security technology — a technology that the government uses for passports and border control, banks use to combat identity theft, police use to find criminals, and one that we see in the movies. However, the high cost, high security, futuristic biometric technology that was unthinkable in business applications just a few years ago is here — and it's adaptable and affordable.

Biometric technology is an automated method of recognizing a person based on physiological or behavioral characteristics. It includes face, fingerprints, hand geometry, handwriting, iris, retina, vein, or voice identification. Fingerprint recognition is by far the most developed technology — currently absorbing 85% of the biometric market. It's trusted, accurate, easy to use, and cost-effective for business implementations.

Many processes in a retail environment require personal identification. The most common types of identification currently used are swiped bar code or picture ID cards, PINs, and visual identification. These methods create their own problems and delays, not to mention the drain on IT resources.

Cards are regularly forgotten, lost, mutilated, and shared. PINs are easily forgotten, swapped, or stolen. In addition, visual ID is a poor solution, especially with today's considerable security concerns and reporting issues. By using the unique fingerprint for identification, the problems and costs associated with the existing methods of identification are avoided, and new standards of accountability are put into place.

Biometrics Aids Loss Prevention, Customer Service

Two areas of identification that retailers need to manage involve customers and employees. Biometric technology is beginning to be used in both of these areas. In some grocery stores, customers use finger scanning to pay for their purchases rather than using cards, checks,



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or cash, making transactions both secure and highly convenient. And finger scanning is used to replace those pesky loyalty cards, which is another convenience for customers.

Biometrics can be used to identify employees, as well. Several areas exist that enable biometrics to improve operations for retailers. Consider using biometrics for time and attendance in order to eliminate 'buddy punching.' Biometric technology can cut down on cash drawer pilferage, an expensive headache for all retailers. Biometrics can be used for other retail functions, such as returns, in which case it eliminates the need for managers to swipe cards or punch in PINs, thus improving customer service. Moreover, using a biometric identification system platform will ensure a scalable system capable of handling growing employee ID needs.

Biometric technology doesn't conjure up the Orwellian fears it used to. Of course, some people still grumble at the mention of systems that scan fingerprints due to misguided privacy fears, but overall, the acceptance of biometrics has risen substantially in the past few years. In fact, people are now realizing that biometrics can actually protect their privacy.

Today, biometric technology is no longer limited to government or high security applications. Like the computers that have become an integral part of our businesses, biometric identification is the next step in making things work faster, safer, cheaper, and more reliably. Biometrics is finally here. And currently, using biometrics to improve operations and customer service is just smart business. □