

Biometrics: Question Mark or Exclamation Point?

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An increase in IT security interest has recast the spotlight on biometric technologies, which previously were not ready for deployment. Are they ready now?

ANALYSIS

Biometrics have been on the verge of market acceptance for several years. Providing "something you are" (e.g., fingerprint or retina scan) in addition to "something you know" (e.g., user identification or password) and "something you have" (e.g., security token, "smart card" or "dongle") is appealing because if it works correctly, the biometric identifies the individual requesting access rather than raising the question, "Did someone else use the password or token?"

Although biometric techniques often are depicted in movies as high-tech ways to control access to secure places, such as the villain's nuclear missile launch sites and secret "fortresses of good or evil," we've found most biometric systems are limited to the doors of the data center. Now, with price points dropping, technical aspects improving and renewed demand for more-effective physical access controls to places such as airports, interest in biometrics is increasing.

However, there are always issues that obstruct emerging technology adoption. With biometrics, these include user acceptance, the potential loss of privacy, false acceptance rates and device deployment difficulties.

To address the benefits and drawbacks of biometrics, Andrew Phillips has assembled research that examines when, and where, biometrics fit in with enterprises and society at large (see "Biometrics Now?" AV-15-5292).

As always, your inquiries and comments are welcome.

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