

Biometrics is here to stay

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Expert Panel 2006



A panel of ID industry experts provided predictions for 2006. One of these glimpses into the future will appear here each day during December.

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Is it, could it be, the year for biometrics? That has been the hope for many years now, but instead of the "hockey stick" growth that has been hoped for, I believe 2006 will be another year of slow but steady growth.

In addition to the rate of growth, the question of relative growth between the commercial and public sectors is another topic of debate. Prior to 9/11, the analysts predicted that commercial use of biometrics would soon outstrip that in the public sector.

Although eventually I believe that will happen due to the larger market and wider array of potential applications of the technology, the focus on security in the public sector has delayed this cross-over point. This is despite the failure to live up to the post-9/11 hype surrounding the technology.

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So what can we expect to see regarding the use of biometrics as a personal identification technology in the coming year?

First, its role in credentialing systems will continue to expand. This begins with its use in government-sponsored programs such as PIV (the new federal employee credential mandated by HSPD-12), machine readable travel documents (such as an e-Passport), the Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC), and registered traveller, to name a few high-profile programs that require biometric enrollment (with associated duplicate and background checks) as well as biometric records to be stored on the credential. Once these programs have ironed out any kinks in their implementation and deployment, it is likely that commercial enterprises may follow suit.

What about the use of biometrics for physical and logical access control? I believe that the near term focus will continue to be on physical access, as that seems to be the biggest pain point at the moment. Further down the road, however, look for their use in logical access applications to expand. This is likely to begin in-house (employees logging into their workstations and local

networks), but will eventually move outwards to remote access and e-authentication applications. However, the latter will only occur once the biometrics industry has convinced the security and cryptographic communities that this can be implemented with sufficient end-to-end security in place.

And on the other end of the spectrum, strides are being made in retail and consumer applications, with more than two million cell phones in the far east selling with embedded fingerprint sensors and companies like Authentec having produced its five millionth fingerprint chip. Besides cell phones, embedded applications in general are likely to expand and include PDA's, remote controls, automobiles, etc.

Finally, look for:

- Fingerprints to remain king, but other, newer biometric technologies to gain ground.
- Further research and expanded implementation/use in the area of multi-biometric fusion.
- Standards activities to continue beyond the recent set of new ANSI and ISO standards.
- Use of biometrics in conjunction with other authentication technologies such as smart cards and PKI.
- Advancements in live-ness detection and anti-spoofing capabilities.

Biometric technology is here to stay, primarily because it does one thing that other technologies can't – link an identity/event to a human being. That capability makes biometrics useful alone, or as a component of a larger identity assurance system.

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