

Criminal link holds back fingerprint acceptance

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Fingerprinting technology is the most reliable and cost effective biometric authentication technology but it's not being deployed on a wide scale because people still imagine that criminals are the only ones that have to surrender their fingerprints, according to Sagem.

Users are resisting the switch to fingerprint authentication technologies because they still see the process of giving a fingerprint as somehow related to being caught by the police, according to Gilles Novel, manager for secure terminals and transactions at Sagem Australasia.

"We have to shift mentality away from where people are scared [of giving their fingerprints]," Novel told *ZDNet Australia*. "The problem we have faced is that people think 'if I enrol my fingerprint there has to be, one way or the other, a link to the police'. They think criminal activity instead of their own privacy."

Novel argues that attitudes are slowly changing -- especially as people slowly realise that fingerprints are more reliable than passwords and can help increase, not erode, privacy.

"If you are an employer and someone does the wrong thing on your network, that person can say 'it wasn't me -- someone has used my password'. But in the case of biometrics, how can you say 'it wasn't my finger?'" Novel told *ZDNet Australia*.

He claimed that fingerprinting is a way of improving privacy because it creates a stronger bond between the person's body and their identity, which is something that is not possible with EFTPOS-style smartcards and PIN numbers.

"Smartcards are a weak link to your body because they can be loaned, borrowed, given or stolen. There is nothing stopping you going to get some cash from an ATM if you have my card and my PIN. It is a bit more difficult with biometrics," he said.

He gave an example of a Swiss bank, which does not require the account holder's identity but needs another way of identifying who is authorised to access the account.

"If you want a secure account in a Swiss bank, they don't want to know your identity but you might authorise yourself with biometrics. This is because they know it's secure but they don't know who you are -- that is a concept that reinforces privacy.

"If you interviewed 100 people five or 10 years ago and asked them if they would give their fingerprints for a secure system they would say no. I am sure it has completely changed by now," added Novel.

In Australia, fingerprinting technology was being adopted by Centrelink, the government's nationwide human services agency. Last year, the organisation decided to ditch passwords in favour of a fingerprint authentication system that would require it to purchase and deploy 31,000 finger scanners.