

LAW and ORDER

Fingerprint Authentication

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Loss or theft of a laptop, and the resulting loss of sensitive data, is both a serious concern and a hot topic. While physically securing the laptop is imperative, part and parcel is the need to protect the data by restricting access to it.

Passwords such as the user's name or the agency name and passwords such as 1-2-3 and A-B-C were very common in the first years of computers in law enforcement. After all, it was new to many users, and we had enough to remember without memorizing some obscure password. More complicated passwords often led the user to violate the basic security levels by "hiding" the password somewhere around the computer, usually on the back of the keyboard or on a sticky note.

An agency with effective and properly used passwords still has issues. Quite simply, folks forget. Generally, the larger the organization using passwords, the higher the support costs.

One of the newest areas hitting law enforcement is fingerprint authentication. Fingerprint authentication is just what it sounds like, a method to automatically verify a match between two fingerprints. This biometric technology has been around for several years, but like many things, it arrives at law enforcement later than the general business world. Biometric authentication uses scanning technology to compare and measure human physical characteristics for the purpose of authentication.

During the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, Scotland Yard officials showed how they used fingerprints for identification. The St. Louis, MO Police is traditionally considered the first police department to actually use fingerprints for identification.

Fingerprint authentication for your agency laptops is not a complicated matter. Many options are available. For example, HP has a variety of notebook PCs on the market that use the HP Biometric Fingerprint Sensor. The HP Compaq nc2400 Notebook PC starts at about \$1,600 and has a variety of security features. The HP ProtectTools is a security feature portfolio that includes a variety of security technologies, including TPM Embedded Security Chip, the HP Biometric Fingerprint Sensor, and an optional SmartCard Reader.

What if you already have hardware and want to add fingerprint authentication? Again, many options are available such as DigitalPersona, one of the leading providers of biometric authentication solutions. DigitalPersona's One Touch LogOn allows the user to log on with the touch of a finger to Windows computers and networks. The One Touch SignOn requires the user to just touch the reader, and it automatically populates all log-on fields with the user data. The U.are.U fingerprint reader connects easily as a USB device and operates just as simply.

The U.are.U Fingerprint Keyboard has a fingerprint reader built into the keyboard. The U.are.U Fingerprint Module is available to physically integrate a fingerprint reader into custom hardware.

As is sometimes the case, i.e., the use of DNA, police agencies in the United Kingdom agencies are ahead of the curve. In September of this year, UK's West Midlands Police reported that they were beginning a three-month trial with an impressive system that actually combines digital and physical security into one system. This will permit access to the buildings and computer systems using a single sign on and includes fingerprint authentication not only on the keyboards but areas such as the computer room itself.

This single system is provided by the access management company, Imprivata. The pilot program will be used by 320 officers in two buildings to control access to 140 applications. If the trial program proves successful, it will increase to 180 buildings and 1,500 staff. In the next few years, access to our police departments may just be via fingerprint and not metal key or mag strip.

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