



Position: ATMIA¹ examines use of biometrics at ATMs

Biometric technology is the use of a person's unique physical or behavioral characteristics, such as a fingerprint or voice pattern, to identify that person. Biometric systems collect and store these personal identifiers.

Possibly the first known example of biometrics in practice was a form of finger printing used in China in the 14th century, as reported by Portuguese explorer and historian João de Barros. Modern-day police use of finger printing was pioneered by Sir Edward Richard Henry, who developed a system between 1896-7 and then fully introduced it when he formed the Metropolitan Police Fingerprint Bureau in 1901. Its original purpose was not to assist in identifying criminals, but to prevent criminals from concealing previous convictions from the police, courts and prisons.

While no other biometric has yet reached the breadth of use of fingerprinting, some other types, such as facial and iris recognition, hand geometry and voice recognition, are beginning to be used in both legal and business areas. Some banks and other corporations have been using biometrics for several years for employee access to computer server rooms and other parts of office buildings.

Currently, there is considerable interest in the question of whether biometrics can help reduce identity theft in a cost-justified way.

The PIN (Personal Identification Number) has been the preferred customer authentication device in self-service banking for almost forty years. Biometrics at ATMs is still an unproven and rarely used technology. However, ATMIA supports the option of biometrics, like fingerprint scans, as an alternative for use in semi-rural and rural communities with low literacy rates and in environments where PIN systems may be difficult to manage. With the development of biometric solutions for the ATMs there is no need to remember PIN numbers. In addition, ATMIA supports the principle that ATM operators should conduct comparative cost-to-benefit analyses of the merits of PIN versus biometrics. Some banks and ATM operators may even introduce biometrics as part of a three-factor authentication system, in addition to magnetic stripe/chip account information and the customer's PIN should the case ever be strong enough to justify the costs.

¹ The ATM Industry Association is a global non-profit trade association serving all businesses and groups in the ATM industry. The association is made up of more than 1,000 members in 50 countries. We currently represent over one million ATMs internationally. For more information go to – www.atmia.com.