Are you bio-secured?

Even before biometrics can make its presence as an acceptable authentication mode, people are already talking of the logical next step--biometric fraud. The latest blockbuster 'Charlie's Angels' provides glimpses of this futuristic development. The movie shows Charlie's three glamour girls breaking into a heavily secured research laboratory by forging fingerprint and iris scan of an authentic user.

This is not the first time that biometrics is featured in movies. The James Bond movies have especially glamorized fingerprint, iris and facial scan methods. In spite of the popularity of biometrics as a powerful authentication tool it is yet to make inroads into the popular arena.

Biometrics leverages the uniqueness of biometrics (traits of human beings). Once identified, these physical characteristics can be exactly measured, numbered, counted-the statistical use of the variations in these unique elements of human beings is known as biometrics.

Practical applications of biometrics--identifiers such as fingerprints, face, hand geometry, iris and voice are already either in use or being tested across the world as secure identification methods. Each offers users the convenience of not having to carry a photo and various cards, keys, passwords and codes as well as the promise of perfect identification. The persons presenting themselves as who they say they are, and no one else.

In the security industry biometrics is regarded as providing the highest level of security. Biometric traits are unique to each individual and can be used to prevent theft or fraud. Unlike a password or personal identification number (PIN), a biometric trait cannot be forgotten, lost, or stolen. Today there are computer rooms, vaults, research labs, day care centres, blood banks, ATMs and military installations to which access is controlled using biometric devices. The Gartner Group predicts that this year (2001) iris recognition and fingerprint recognition systems will be the tools of choice for corporations that adopt biometrics. The practical applications of biometric technologies are diverse and expanding, as new needs are identified.

Even though biometric technology has been around for many years, it has been very expensive and somewhat difficult to use. Therefore, it has been relegated to military and other very high-security applications where security is of utmost importance. In the last two or three years, many companies have been working on new biometric authentication technologies that bring the cost down and ease-of-use up. But, with Internet boom and demand for online authentication increasing, it is time now to go in for widespread biometric usage. Technology companies need to prepare for this new battle and of course keep an eye on Charlie's angels who are ready to break into them.

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