

Press Release 04/2011

February 8, 2011

Page 1



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CeBIT 2011: Biometrics for companies — data protection is the critical issue

At some companies, biometric systems are already being used for access control or time registration purposes. Growth can be expected here in the future. Fraunhofer biometrics expert Alexander Nouak explains what should be taken into consideration when using these systems.

(Darmstadt/Rostock/Graz) Biometric systems recognize people via distinct physical features and are used as proof of authorization. With the use of fingerprints, iris scan or facial recognition, forgetting passwords or displacing keys is no longer an issue. Enhanced comfort is the key argument used by all biometrics manufacturers.

"The critical issue, however, is data protection", explains Alexander Nouak, head of the "Identification and Biometrics" Competence Center at Fraunhofer IGD, the world's leading research institute for applied Visual Computing. "Companies using biometric systems must think about this issue twice when it comes to their staff."

According to Nouak, it is essential to prevent that the biometric data saved by the system are inappropriately used and that the privacy of the staff member is violated by the systems. There may be a violation of privacy if the system enables the employer to create an exact movement and behavior profile of its employees. For instance: When did Mayer unlock his PC? Or: Is Müller at the cafeteria? "There are already some manufacturers who have built in security restrictions in this regard", says Nouak. "In doing so, the event log of an access control system can only be viewed with the prior consent of a works council member by password."

The issue of actual data protection, i.e. the risk that my fingerprint is stolen, is not yet solved in this way, however. According to the Fraunhofer researcher, biometric data are best protected by not saving them in the first place.



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Press Release 04/2011

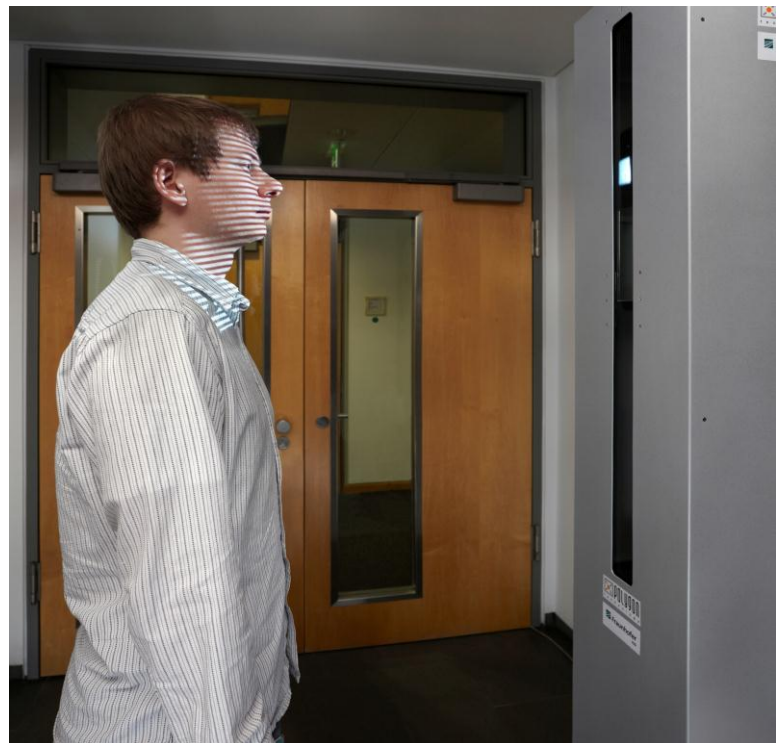
February 8, 2011

Page 2



TECHNISCHE
UNIVERSITÄT
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Researchers at Fraunhofer IGD have developed a system which can do without saved biometrics (cf. http://www.presseportal.de/go2/Fraunhofer_IGD_Biometrie) and which they will present at CeBIT in Hanover in Hall 9 Booth B36.



Picture: At some companies, biometric systems such as 3D facial recognition (picture) are already used for access control or time registration purposes. Growth can be expected here in the future. Privacy and data protection must be ensured in this regard. This is a challenge for research. At CeBIT 2011, Fraunhofer IGD will present a system which can do without saved biometrics. (Copyright: Fraunhofer IGD)

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Press Release 04/2011

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Page 3



TECHNISCHE
UNIVERSITÄT
DARMSTADT

The Fraunhofer IGD is the world's leading institute for applied research in Visual Computing. Visual Computing is image- and model-based information technology. It includes computer graphics, computer vision, as well as virtual and augmented reality.

Fraunhofer IGD develops prototypes and complete solutions pursuant to customer-specific requirements. The researchers at Fraunhofer IGD use, record and process images and graphics for all conceivable computer-based applications.

The research and development projects of Fraunhofer IGD directly relate to current business issues. The application spectrum of the concepts, models and practical solutions is as diverse as it is specialized. It ranges from virtual product design via medical science, transportation all the way to multi-media learning and training.

Together with its partner universities, Fraunhofer IGD researches various key technologies and cooperates with companies in many different industry sectors. In addition to the head office in Darmstadt, Fraunhofer IGD has further sites in Rostock, Graz and Singapore. It has around 180 (full-time equivalent) employees. The budget amounts to around 15 million euros.



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