

# Boosting Business with Biometrics

*A growing number of organizations and businesses are streamlining customer verification, service, transaction processing, reporting, and even customization with biometric fingerprint technology*



Unless a business operates solely by cash or is independently financed, it has to verify customers, deliver service and process transactions. But typical verification by ID card, personal identification number or customer lookup by phone number can be slow, labor intensive and plagued by fraud, replacement card costs and other inefficiencies. Today, a growing number of organizations and businesses are streamlining such costs of doing business as well as creating reporting or custom service options with biometric fingerprint technology.

Biometric systems automatically identify a person based on physical characteristics such as fingerprints, which remain unique and consistent throughout life. By speeding the verification of registered customers based only on the unique mathematical patterns of their fingerprint reading, savvy organizations from health clubs and service agencies to retailers and school cafeterias are realizing the benefits of fast, hassle-free customer identification and service while securing their privacy.

## *Expediting service, cutting expenses*

Since carrying an ID card when going to swim, workout or jog can be inconvenient and prone to loss, health clubs are turning to biometric fingerprint ID technology to simplify the member verification process.

Linvilla Orchards, for instance, which operates two private swim clubs in Media, Pennsylvania recently began using biometric fingerprint identification technology at the front desks of its swim clubs.

"The goal was to help members enter without the hassle of carrying, locating and displaying a membership card," explains Ron Ferber, Senior Manager at Linvilla Orchards. "We also wanted to cut the expense of replacing lost cards and reduce the fraudulent use of cards by non-members."

The biometric fingerprint system supplied by FSS, a biometric system provider ([www.biometricsolution.com](http://www.biometricsolution.com)), is secure and easy to use. Club members enroll by placing a finger on the reader and the reading is converted into a number, so the fingerprint is never stored. Enrollment is typically done at member sign up.

"Since members don't need to remember their cards or dig through pockets, purses or gym bags looking for them, check in can be faster," says Ferber, who foresees wider use of biometric fingerprint ID technology in health clubs, big box retailers, and in place of supermarket reward cards and credit card signatures. "There are no embarrassing pictures to take, no replacement card costs, and members never forget their finger. Any business with membership or frequent transactions should consider the technology."

"Improving the client's experience is vital," agrees Karlene Lewis, who has twenty years experience with the YMCA and is currently COO of Corpus Christi Metro Ministries (CCMM), a non-profit organization serving the poor and homeless in Corpus Christi, Texas.

"Service organizations can't afford to have staff constantly look up clients in their system," says Lewis. "Clients lose or misplace their cards all the time. If a national service organization like the YMCA were to avoid the cost of replacing lost cards and verifying membership by staff lookup, they could save millions of dollars annually. Biometric fingerprint ID seems a practical way for members to quickly prove their identity and gain entry."

To more effectively serve the poor and homeless, CCMM now operates its free cafeteria service using a biometric fingerprint ID system rather than a previous token or ticket-based system. Clients no longer worry about carrying or losing tokens or tickets and are served meals faster in the cafeteria. Data such as age, gender and veteran status is also captured, which could help with grant or federal funding requirements.

## *Protecting society, generating ROI*

Alcohol and tobacco retailers are also turning to biometric fingerprint identification technology, which can verify ID in a fraction of the time it takes to "card" a customer, in order to protect themselves and society from the dangers of underage drinking. This speeds checkout while offering enhanced convenience and liability protection.

Using a biometric fingerprint ID system provided by FSS, customers register in a one-minute process where they volunteer their driver's license number, date of birth, license expiration date, and a finger for digital scanning. After initial registration, those customers no longer need to hunt through their wallets or purses to locate identification, and clerks no longer have to scrutinize photo ID to gauge authenticity. Instead, registered customers simply press a forefinger on a small fingerprint reader by each register, and within a second one of three lights illuminate: green (indicating the customer is 21 and able to buy anything); yellow (indicating the customer is 18-21 and able to buy tobacco but not alcohol); and red (indicating the customer isn't in the system and must show ID). The system can be adjusted for differing age requirements for each state.

"To the alcohol and tobacco retail industry, which has been scapegoated for years, fingerprint ID technology is a godsend," said Bob Zenner, who is implementing it in his Alamosa, Colorado liquor store and expects it to be used throughout the San Luis Valley Alcohol Retailers Alliance.

"Fingerprint ID not only protects honest retailers from the penalties and liability of selling to minors, but also speeds the point of sale six-fold compared to manual ID checking," continued Zenner. "In efficiency alone, the system will pay for itself at my store in four days. It would've paid for itself four times over had it prevented our first 'selling to minor' infraction. It'll help retailers sleep at night, knowing that poor employee discretion won't result in fines or suspension."

Once the fingerprint ID technology is fully implemented throughout the San Luis Valley Alcohol Retailers Alliance, a registered customer of any store in the group will be able to prove ID at any other store. This will be done within one second at the fingerprint reader by the register.

This scenario of near-instant age verification can be duplicated within any state, enabling a customer to buy alcohol or tobacco statewide with a simple fingerprint reading. State lottery systems at most retailers already use the secure data-sharing equipment necessary to make this work. Such technology, in combination with biometrics, can better protect the vendor without sacrificing profit.

"Alcohol and tobacco retailers have been portrayed as villains," said Zenner. "Fingerprint ID is the best way to show the public we're not in business to serve minors, but want to be part of the solution."

## *Universal access and convenience*

For universal access to food and other college campus services, the fingerprint-based solution provided by FSS can also be extended to replace "one-card" programs that are already in 45% of the nation's universities. Such a system would operate in much the same way – minus the ID card – for a variety of options including university stores, library use, residence hall access, washer/dryer and even time and attendance.

At Campbell University, a 2700-student university in Buies Creek, North Carolina, for instance, the FSS fingerprint ID system has been installed at four outlets spread throughout the 100 acre-plus site: the Marshbanks Dining Hall, Oasis Deli, a café and a grill. Previously, the university used a card system using magnetic strips. But this system had reached the end of its useful life.

"It took several seconds for the old system to identify each card," said Doug Rumbold, foodservice operations and productions manager at Campbell University. "We also had issues with lost cards and people accessing others accounts."

FSS came on site to install the system, which is comprised of its proprietary software to identify users, fingerprint scanners, card readers and POS registers. Each register at Campbell's four foodservice sites is hooked up over the campus network to one server in Rumbold's office.

"With our system, we have the capabilities to edit, delete, set prices, view reports of specific item sales, track sales by cashier and much more," said Rumbold. "There is no doubt that a fingerprint system is faster and more convenient. Students no longer have to pull an ID card out of their pockets, we are more profitable and foodservice management has been made easier."

## *Helping schools help students*

Public schools such as those of the Penn Cambria and Wilson School Districts in Pennsylvania have adopted fingerprint scanning and identification systems to handle a host of problems from slow lunch lines, lost lunch money, cumbersome payment, lunch fraud and bullying, to falling National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participation, along with declining reimbursement for programs such as Title I, E-rate, and No Child Left Behind, which use the NSLP data to gauge poverty.

Without cash, tickets, or cards to be located or exchanged, lunch lines move faster and students have more time to eat without rushing. Because there are no color-coded tickets or different amounts of cash involved, nobody knows who is buying a free or reduced price lunch. This eliminates the reputed stigma of being a 'free lunch student,' which can help boost school lunch participation and federal reimbursement via the programs tied to it.

Teachers and parents are also finding that by eliminating the daily handling of lunch money or tickets, especially in kindergarten or elementary classrooms, they can free up time for added instruction or other useful activities. "Teachers love that the new system gets lunch money out of their classrooms," said Brenda Bucynski, secretary to Penn Cambria School District's Food Service Director. "One teacher says she's gained half-an-hour of teaching time a day, since she no longer has to concern herself with lunch money during class."

Because parents can set up a lunch account linked to a biometric system for their child's use, they can not only be sure their child has enough money for lunch each day, but also can monitor what their kids are buying. "Whether standard school lunch or a la carte, parents can easily keep track of their children's lunch purchases in the monthly billing statements mailed to them," said Penn Cambria's Food Service Director Joe Geisweid. "That ensures that lunch money is spent for its intended use, and also puts an end to any predatory lunch money bullying."

The Wilson School District in West Lawn, Penn. turned to fingerprint ID technology primarily to expedite the lunch payment processing at the request of parents.

"Parents didn't want to doll out \$1.60 for their child every day, or give them a \$10.00 bill and wonder if they'd ever see the change," said Pat Anthony, Food Service Director for the Wilson School District. "Parents wanted to pre-pay for lunch, but keeping track of accounts with paper and pencil was untenable. And we didn't want to buy into a system where parents would end up taping PIN numbers to their kid's hands."

Since biometric systems automate the payment and accounting of school lunches, they eliminate tedious backend administrative chores such as cash, ticket, or paper-based handling, accounting, reconciling, and oversight.

One biometric school lunch program, [www.myschoolaccount.com](http://www.myschoolaccount.com), for instance, even has an online component that allows parents to pre-pay for school lunches as well as monitor and to some degree customize their children's food choices. The technology enables parents to restrict their children's choices to avoid 'special diet' conflicts or to prevent children from purchasing high fat, high sugar a la carte items.

For more info about biometric identification systems, write to FSS Inc. at 1227 Eleventh Avenue, Altoona, PA 16601; call (814) 949-2037; fax (814) 946-7572; or visit their website [www.biometricsolution.com](http://www.biometricsolution.com).

*Del Williams is a technical writer based in Torrance, California.*

