

Striking While The Iron Is Hot

By Laura Guevin

April 29, 2003

If you ask George Waller, CEO of [StrikeForce Technologies, Inc.](#), what he thinks about the state of the biometric market, he's quick to say the industry has a lot of growing up to do. But he'll also add that the need for sophisticated biometric technologies is paramount right now, and proper marketing and reseller channels are what must be developed to adequately position biometrics as valuable identification and security solutions.

Waller is pretty much on target. Biometric adoption, particularly within the enterprise and other vertical market segments, has been somewhat slow. Sure, the military and government sectors have been quick to trial and deploy various levels of the technology, but the private sector is wary - and more importantly, confused and overwhelmed at the number of choices available. Which biometric technology will best serve their needs? What is the best way to purchase and deploy the technology? And will that deployment involve purchasing various elements of a piecemeal solution and beating oneself over the head to get it to work -- or worse -- to get it to interoperate with existing security systems and networks?

One of the main problems with the marketing and sale of biometric technologies to date has been a lack of cohesive and comprehensive offerings through trusted resellers. Potential buyers don't know where to turn, and it doesn't help that there are hundreds of competing technologies available, each branded in a slightly different way. What is needed is a strong effort on the part of resellers to offer easy-to-install solutions tailored specifically to various vertical markets, with service guarantees to boot.

StrikeForce realizes the importance of the reseller community, and has already begun working with big names like SAIC, Northrop Grumman, and Titan, and is working to finalize a deal with Unisys as well. The ability to be able to scale their biometric solution to accommodate hundreds of users is vital - and trusted names in the reseller community can help them achieve this goal.

reseller community can help them achieve this goal.

BEYOND MIDDLEWARE

StrikeForce offers unique solutions featuring multiple levels of authentication centered on the COBAS model: Centralized Out-of-Band Authentication System. Not quite middleware, the COBAS system goes beyond acting as a conduit between biometric hardware and software or a database. The system requires a minimum of three things to authenticate individuals: Something they have (like a phone), something they know (a password or other phrase) and something they are - a biometric such as a voice, iris or fingerprint. When a user attempts to log into a COBAS-protected system, information such as a user name and password are sent through separate IP routes, making it extremely difficult for spoofer to decrypt this delicate information.

The company also offers second-person authentication. For instance, an executive is going to be out of town and her assistant needs access to important PC files. In order to log in, the assistant must be authenticated. But this attempt at authentication triggers a message to the executive - either by phone, e-mail, or instant message, requiring her permission in real time to allow the assistant to access the PC. This would also be important in a financial services situation, where a teller might not be authorized to transfer a certain amount of money and a supervisor would have to give permission to enable the transaction.

The StrikeForce system works well for Web service authentication, VPN, domain and Web service access, and transaction authentication. Customers also have a variety of options for implementing the solution, including owning it outright, leasing it, renting it from the company or a reseller, offering it to other customers as a managed service, or using it for monthly transaction authentication, like in the case of a phone company or off-track betting center.

"We're security for a network world," said Thomas Yon, vice president of government affairs for StrikeForce. Yon explained that the COBAS system can work on any operating system or platform, using any type of hardware, and using all types of biometrics - from iris recognition to voice verification. The company incorporates a voice verification engine from Nuance into their core offering.

[TMC Research](#) projects the biometric market is expected to grow from \$116 million in 2000 to approaching \$2 billion in 2006. By 2010, the market will grow to more than \$5 billion worldwide.

2010, the market will grow to more than \$5 billion worldwide. None of this growth can be achieved, however, without proper marketing of available biometric solutions. Accuracy and usability have seen great improvements in recent years and even months - particularly with government programs like the Department of Defense's Face Recognition Vendor Test and Common Access Card initiative. But biometric vendors must look beyond the government if they hope to gain mainstream acceptance and revenue from the enterprise world, and resellers will undoubtedly open their products and technology to a new world of prospects.