

POS TECHNOLOGY

Let your fingers do the paying

Although paying for purchases today is much more streamlined than it has been in the past, it's still a rather labor-intensive process for those paying by methods other than cash. In most transactions, the items are individually posted and a total is generated. Then the customer is required to remove a credit card from his or her wallet and either swipe it or hand it to a sales associate.

In either case, there's that inevitable whistling in the dark moment while the transaction is processed, a receipt generated, signed, returned, a copy of the receipt provided and the items bagged. Removing even one of those steps can help consumers have a better retail experience.

A number of new devices are beginning to become available to aid in this goal. Most of them have systems based on biometrics, using a measurable biological characteristic to process a transaction. Fingerprints, retina or iris scans and signatures are among the most common items used, although hand geometry and vein analysis are becoming increasingly popular.

For POS purposes, the system works like this: A sales associate scans the items and produces a total. The customer inserts a thumb into a reader and enters a digital code. The transaction is swiftly completed and a receipt provided.

Vein pattern readers and even palm print biometrics are expected to be available commercially in the coming year.

The same biometric technology can be adapted to help keep track of comings and goings at a store, providing an audit trail of who enters the building and when they leave.

A number of credit card companies also offer retailers the opportunity to allow their customers to simply tap their specially equipped credit card, keychain or similar device against a receiver to pay for purchases. American Express and MasterCard, among others, offer this service. The technology has also been incorporated into cell phones.

On the back end, transactions appear just as if a card had been swiped.

CONTINUED ■■■■■



Don't sign here

- > Signature capture terminals are the most common form of biometrics used in speeding customers through checkouts.
- > Touch screen terminals at POS are used in many grocery stores and are becoming more common in retail stores of all types.
- > Digital check-imaging devices allow retailers to take advantage of the benefits of electronic check conversion, including reduced check processing costs and losses through bad checks.

FingerPoint technology devices such as this one from La Gard Inc. (www.lagard.com) offer increased security for a variety of retail purposes.

Fingerprints, retina or iris scans and signatures are among the most common items used.

