



INNOVATION

IBM Introducing Fingerprint Reader Into Laptop

By Jack M. Germain October 4, 2004 4:55 AM PT  [Email Article](#)

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Biometric security, at least in theory, has been around for a decade. But the use of biometrics for computer security and user authentication has failed to attract much practical interest to date because the clunky devices were costly, inconvenient, and intrusive.

All that could change this week when IBM introduces a fingerprint reader built into its newest ThinkPad laptop, the ThinkPad T42. A finger scan is required to gain log-on access to the portable computer and its contents, delivering simplified access to password-protected personal and financial information, Web sites, documents, and e-mail.

Secure log-on devices such as keystroke pattern recognition and fingerprint scanners were developed years ago. These devices have been improved in recent years and supplemented with voice recognition software, signature verification scanners, and infrared iris scanners.

But IBM executives are confident that this first-of-its-kind biometric security subsystem will set a new standard for computer makers to follow.

"No one ever tied a scanner device to a security chip before now," IBM's Clain Anderson told TechNewsWorld. "This is a very interesting security solution." Anderson is IBM's program director for security and wireless devices in the Personal Computing Division.

Hard-Wired Security

"Today we raised the bar on security for the entire PC industry," said Fran O'Sullivan, general manager, IBM Personal Computing Division. "What was once considered sci-fi technology is now available to all enterprises, large and small, in the notebook of choice for everyday business."

The fingerprint reader is combined with an Embedded Security Subsystem to provide a layer of security that is built in, not bolted on, he said.

Anderson said the registered templates of authorized users are stored on a security chip within the scanner device. The fingerprint reader is located on the wrist-rest below the arrow keys near the lower right edge of the notebook.

A user must swipe his or her finger across a small, horizontal sensor to log on to the computer, software applications, Web sites, or databases.

According to IBM product literature, this type of fingerprint reader captures more data than a traditional picture-capture window. It scans more of the fingertip's surface area, helping to prevent misidentification.

Streamlined Access

Anderson said the swiping and recognition process takes less than one minute. In the same timeframe, multiple users can be registered with a scan and added to the approved boot sequence in much the same fashion as shared users register their passwords in Windows.

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The enhanced security system can be bypassed by not using the companion security software, Anderson said. But the hardware and software combine to create a new level of secure access. The ThinkPad T42 offers the latest version of its Client Security Software, Version 5.4, with a secure Password Manager.

"The new Password Manager is really pretty cool," Anderson said. "It integrates seamlessly to provide automatic secured access to Web sites and other software."

The new software and the embedded security chip are seamlessly integrated with the fingerprint reader, protecting vital security information, such as encryption keys, electronic credentials, and passphrases, and guarding against unauthorized user access.

Price To Drive Acceptance

Most add-on security devices cost from US\$150 to \$200, Anderson said. IBM is packaging the finger scanner and software for \$50.

"That's a good deal and makes this new model very competitive," Anderson told TechNewsWorld.

The ThinkPad T42 notebook will be available on October 19. This is the only IBM notebook model to offer the fingerprint reader. Prices for ThinkPad T42, with various configuration options, start at \$1,699.

Aimed at the mobile user, the T42 is one inch thin and has a travel weight of 4.5 pounds. Select models offer IBM’s unique battery configuration, capable of providing up to 7.5 hours of computing power from the nine-cell extended battery and optional Ultrabay Slim battery.

The T42 line is powered by an Intel 745 Pentium M 1.8 GHz processor. All T42 models come standard with a modem, Gigabit Ethernet, and Infrared port.

More Biometric Breakthroughs

IBM officials said test market responses have been very encouraging. Anderson said IBM expects this latest innovation in biometric security to form a new standard for security PC access.

“We are seeing a tremendous customer response to the fingerprint reader,” he said. “We expect consumer pressure on other manufacturers to make the fingerprint reader a standard security device in all new computers.”

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Anderson said IBM views biometric security as a must-have feature. As such, company engineers have been looking at a lot of different biometric devices, including iris scanners. Advances in camera technology for computers will drive the development of a new level of reliability for built-in iris scanners on portable computers.

“I foresee this biometric enhancement as being about one year away,” he said.

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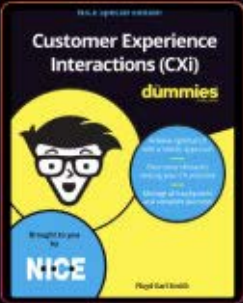
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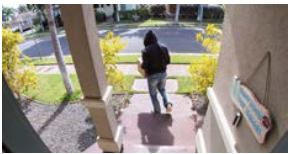
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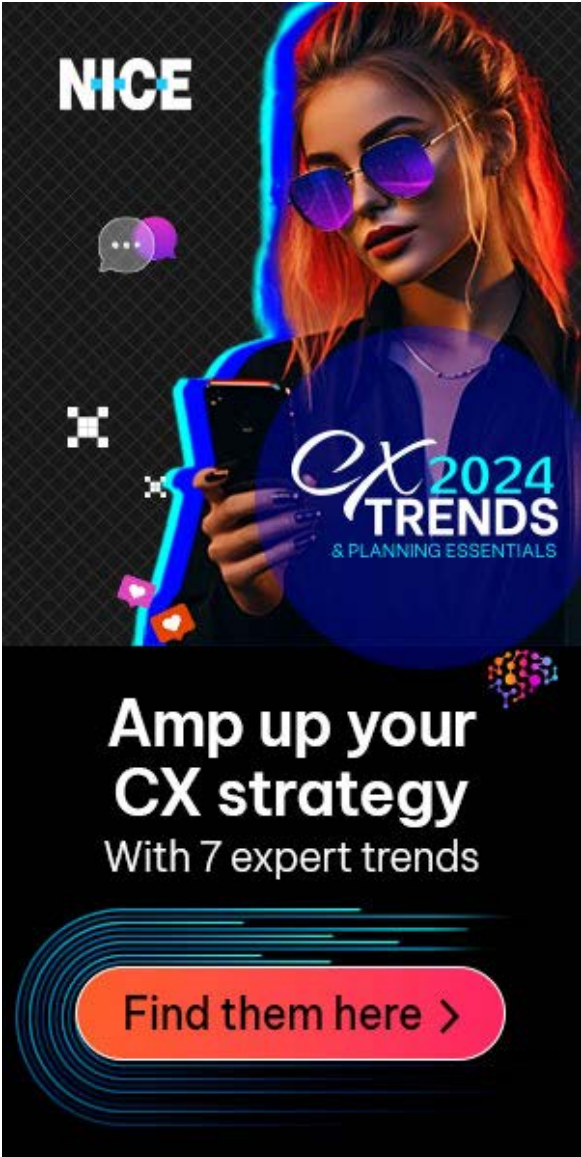
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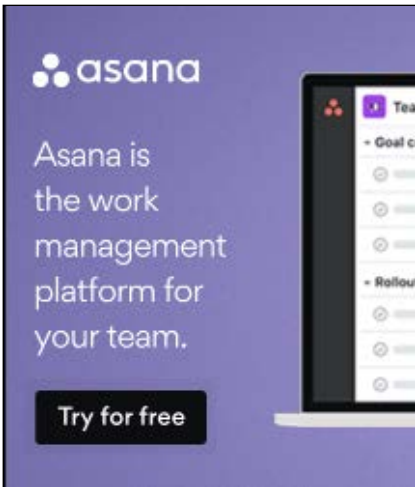
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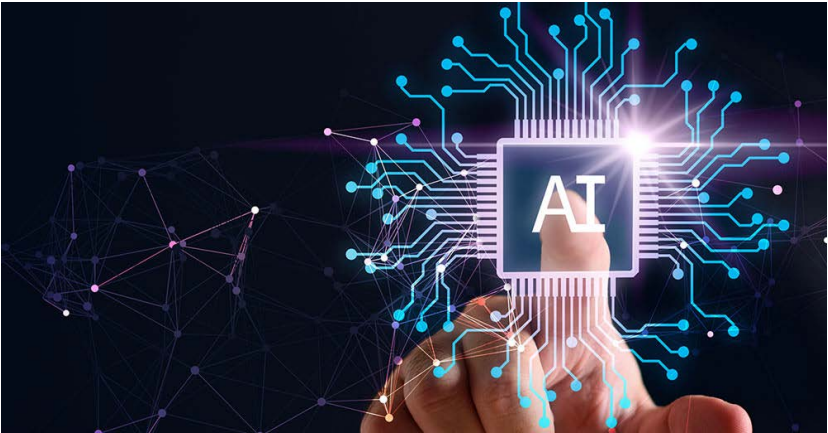
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