

# Petercam: biometric identification guarantees security

When in 2006 Petercam, the Luxembourg asset management company, implemented highly secure single sign-on for its various applications, it optimised its security at the same time as making things more convenient for its staff.

A wide range of software means dealing with almost as many password syntaxes and change policies as there are applications. One system will demand ten characters, another several digits, a third will use different rules; one will make a change compulsory every 3 months and ban the use of the last 10 passwords; with another, a monthly change with re-use of passwords used at least 5 months ago allowed, etc.

## More simplicity, more profitability

All this entails a proportional risk of forgetting passwords, or writing them down as reminders left within the gaze of the curious. "This risk is human. You cannot blame a user for getting mixed up between the different passwords that identify him to the different applications he is allowed to use", points out Christian Bertrand, Administrator at Petercam Luxembourg. "Three years ago, we wanted to get rid of these pitfalls for good, all the more so as they genuinely wasted time. This was particularly true at the end of holiday periods without IT people being begged to update the various passwords, i.e. time frittered away on tasks with no added value", he continues. Steria PSF Luxembourg found itself entrusted with implementing a single sign-on solution by Imprivata, that was already partly used by the parent company. However, doing this without changing any application, no matter what the platform, required that all the requisite types of screen be captured

and recognised, i.e. throughout the system those containing the initial prompts for connecting to an application and those requesting a change of password. "Steria carried out this relatively complex task without any problems", Christian Bertrand stresses once again.

After a few months, the 27 staff at Petercam Luxembourg no longer had to remember what was now a single password, since the company decided to install fingerprint readers on its machines: "Identification, which can be done using either of the two fingers identified by the system, is thus made even simpler, while security is even greater. The coordinates of 8 points on the finger are put through an algorithm, which produces a number that identifies the user, and there is only one chance in 3 million of two people producing the same number", he continues.

## The question of traceability

The resulting convenience has overcome the reservations some people have about biometrics. In any case the print is not scanned and hence cannot be used elsewhere. Another benefit for the company: a check that an application is actually being used, which makes it possible to question its place in the system using irrefutable arguments. Christian Bertrand: "Given that we can monitor the time and frequency of use of an application, we can now rely on numbers, not just the statements of users, to check whether keeping it is relevant. If a member



**Christian Bertrand**, Administrator at Petercam Luxembourg: "Single sign-on combined with biometrics means we can guarantee there is no danger of a password being discovered by an unauthorised person."

of staff claims he desperately needs software that he in fact only uses once a year, we can show him that maintaining it is too expensive and the sensible thing is to look at another solution." Since this solution has been installed at Petercam, two other big local banks have followed suit and today there are three production sites in Luxembourg, with over 1,000 users.