

THE FUTURE OF ACCESS CONTROL

By Patricia Ames, The Imaging Channel

MFPS ARE COMPUTERS that can print, copy, scan and fax. They have their own CPU and memory and support their own applications. Many are web-enabled and dovetail with a lot of the applications that businesses rely on in their day-to-day operations. This is great for productivity, but is also what makes access control at the MFP so important. It prevents unauthorized users from poking around in places they shouldn't be, such as file repositories that are connected to the MFP. (It also prevents employees from running up your print bill.)

But even with so much in common, businesses dedicate far more resources toward securing their PCs than they do their MFPs. Think of it — there probably isn't a single computer in your office that you can sit down in front of and start using without a password. The same cannot be said for many of your MFPs.

Recently, I spoke with John Villegas, vice president of sales and business development with Elatec, a leader in the design and manufacture of RFID solutions. We talked about RFID, authentication by smartphone, security, and ways to help make life easier for customers.

PROTECTION

Nowadays, usernames and passwords — even strong passwords — are failing to protect physical assets from unauthorized users.

That's because, with some good old social engineering, fraudsters can compel your customers to serve up their usernames and password on a silver platter. The same cannot be said for RFID cards. Phishing for a username/password is useless when there is an RFID card locking down the device.

SIMPLICITY

Enhanced security aside, swiping an RFID card or presenting your smartphone instead of entering codes manually makes for quick, convenient, and — critically in the current landscape — touchless access. Some RFID solutions can even detect cards from a distance, so users can be authenticated before they get to the control panel.

RFID technology also makes life easier for IT professionals. Some RFID solutions enable users to self-register their own replacement cards should they lose the original, which can save the IT staff a lot of time resetting users' passwords. Villegas mentioned that Elatec has developed RFID readers that can be configured remotely via an MFP's internal web page or with the use of a special encrypted card that can program the reader with one swipe. This can come in handy if a business is acquired or merges with another company, when staff can otherwise spend a lot of time integrating disparate IT environments.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

It begs the question of why any technology that tokenizes credentials on a physical asset isn't the standard for access control in every office.

RFID user authentication and access control seems to be an excellent way for dealers to diversify a portfolio of products and services. For one, it's a good upsell for MFPs that you place in the field. But even more importantly, it's a foot in the door with new customers you might not typically approach. That's because RFID can be used to lock down a lot more than printers. Elatec told me their RFID solutions are used for everything from general physical access management, single sign-on, fleet management, and secure printing, to taking time and attendance, vending and ticketing, EV charging stations, and gaming.

In a post-COVID-19 world, contactless access control solutions will sound more appealing than in the past. "The contactless aspect of access control has been around since the beginning of radio frequency, but it was never about hygiene," said Villegas. Instead, most saw contactless access control as a way to reduce the wear and tear on magstripes and other cards, as well as the reader itself. But now, with good hygiene and social distancing practices top of mind for most of the world, dealers might have an extra angle to hook customers. 