

Passfaces for Windows 3.03

Passwords are such a critical part of an IT security strategy - and yet they can so often be its weakest link. Users are often expected to remember multiple username and password combinations, so it comes as no surprise when these get written down on Post-it notes and stuck underneath desks. Furthermore, it places an unwanted burden on support staff, as they constantly spend valuable and limited time having to deal with calls to reset lost or forgotten passwords.

Passfaces offers a remarkably simple solution to this perennial problem, cleverly employing facial recognition. Termed cognometrics, the system relies on a human's innate ability to recognise faces and uses this to provide authentication. So there are no more complex alphanumeric strings of meaningless characters to remember - just the ability to pick out faces from a crowd. This makes the system very difficult to crack, as faces can be tricky to describe accurately and will be almost impossible to guess.

Passfaces for Windows is offered in two versions, where one integrates with Active Directory and the other offers a standalone solution for authentication via IIS web servers. Installation of the AD version starts with some groundwork on your server, as the 'user comment' attribute needs to be modified. This is easy enough to do, as Passfaces provides a utility that runs on the domain controllers and performs this action for you. Next, a client component needs to be deployed to each workstation where it changes the Windows login prompt to a custom Passfaces version. A configuration service also needs to be loaded on to your servers but, once again, this is easy enough to carry out.



The products administration utility can be run on a domain controller or workstation and opens with a request for a domain to be selected. The main interface is really very simple to use, as it provides a list of all domain users and their group membership. You can select multiple entries and upgrade them to use the Passfaces scheme at the next password change. The interface is slightly different when selecting individuals, as this offers an option for disabling Passfaces and reverting back to the standard Windows login. It's worth noting that this product doesn't replace user passwords, but acts as a second line of defence, so initial passwords don't need to be made excessively complex. Although not ideal, there is an option to leave the password blank, so users just have to enter their login name to access the Passfaces process.

Users are presented with a grid of nine faces from which they need to pick the right one and you can present up to six different grids. Once all the correct faces have been selected, authentication is complete and they can get on with their work. Clearly, this new security scheme needs to be introduced to the workplace

gently, as it's substantially different to standard login procedures.

Usefully, you can select users to receive a training session that doesn't require them to change their existing password. And the session takes the hard work out of migrating users as, at their next login, it gently guides them through the procedures.

The number of grids presented to the user is determined from the administration tool and each is accompanied with clear instructions. Support and training staff will appreciate the fact that this is a simple process and one most users should be able to understand, without resorting to requests for help.

Passfaces is an unusual solution to the manifold problems caused by passwords. Most people can remember faces instinctively, so it makes perfect sense to use this ability as a means of authentication.

Product: Passfaces for Windows v3.03
Supplier: ACAL ATM Security
Telephone: 01276 607200
Web site: www.passfaces.com
Price: 100 users - £8.40 per user

Verdict: Passfaces is a neat solution to the manifold problems caused by passwords, cleverly employing facial recognition. Most people can remember faces instinctively, so it makes perfect sense to use this ability as a means of authentication. The Passfaces for Windows 3.03 system would be very difficult to crack, as faces can be tricky to describe accurately and almost impossible to guess.