New iPhone app identifies moulded parts

The trend for product authentication apps is growing, as various brand protection companies capitalise on opportunities for exploiting smartphone technology. Now it appears the industry is moving towards using smartphones for authentication in industrial settings.

Swiss digital image authentication specialist AlpVision has released a software application to allow employees working in manufacturing, distribution and retail outlets, and customs and law enforcement officials, to authenticate moulded parts instantly with an iPhone.

AlpVision CEO Fred Jordan says that smartphones are both more portable and faster than regular scanners, and he dismisses fears that they are not suited to warehouse environments.

He comments: 'There are excellent protective cases for iPhones, which will easily compare to the robustness of a rugged PC.'

The app is suitable for many items in the fast-moving consumer goods sector, including containers for liquid, powder or tablets, toys, footwear, home appliances, circuit breakers, and many other products in industrial and consumer markets.

While companies have previously used specifically designed technology for security and authentication, the progress in smartphone apps presents a simple alternative.

AlpVision has received a lot of interest and is planning meetings with interested parties over the coming months.

Jordan comments: 'Of course, we had a number of customers and prospects, in particular in the pharma industry, who have been waiting for this for years and were of course enthusiastic.

'But there were others, particularly those using moulded parts – flip-off tops, plastic bottles in particular – that showed high interest immediately.'

Moulded parts using the company's patented Fingerprint technology will show up as either genuine or fake when scanned using the application, without the need for any additional marking.

Fingerprint is based on a stored image that registers unique, microscopic differences generated by the manufacturing process and the raw material used. For mass-produced objects using a mould, the same unique signature will be present on all of the objects that have been produced with the same mould.

Digital images of the original product are stored in a secure server.

After selection of product type – for example a 300ml container – and a mould cavity number, which is visible on the item, an overlaid shape appears on the phone screen.

The user then has to position the device to match the overlaid shape with the item to be verified. If the item is genuine, a beep sounds and a message appears on screen.

A verification usually takes about three seconds.

Companies like marketing security specialist Aequitaz have previously used smartphone app functionality to allow consumers to authenticate products themselves.

The company introduced an app that creates a virtual certificate of authenticity when the user scans their product (see *Brand* 5.4).

It is unlikely that the capabilities of industrial-use smartphone apps like AlpVision's will remove the need for tailored authentication technology. However apps like Fingerprint may open the possibilities for security tools among a greater number of businesses and staff that previously did not consider their need for brand protection technologies.

Three-second verification with an iPhone

Source: AlpVision