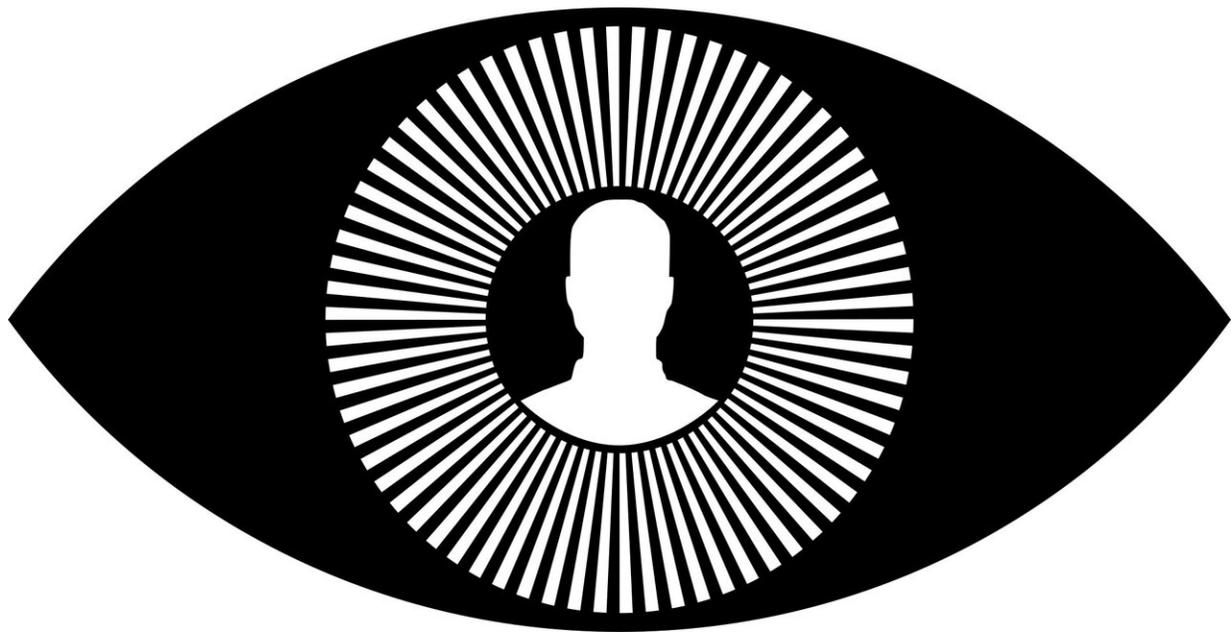


Facial recognition, thermal imaging part of future with coronavirus

July 31 2020, by Samantha Raudins



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

The coronavirus pandemic has inspired a new wave of technology closely tied to Ohio businesses, including thermal imaging and facial recognition software which can detect fevers among employees, a common symptom of the virus.

Smile for the camera—it might be taking your temperature.

The coronavirus pandemic has inspired a new wave of technology closely tied to Ohio businesses, including [thermal imaging](#) and [facial recognition software](#) that can detect fevers among employees, a common symptom of the virus.

PopEntry+ combines instant facial recognition and temperature screening that can connect to employees' mobile devices, lock doors if a person's temperature is too high and record all that on a time log. The device has been rolled out nationwide with the help of Wasserstrom, a 104-year-old Columbus distributor and manufacturer of food-service equipment and supplies.

John Miller, CEO of PopID, which makes the product, said it has been implemented in offices, professional sports complexes, restaurants, factories, assisted-living facilities and college campuses. Its purpose is to more efficiently screen employees, Miller said.

"If you've got a big facility with hundreds of people coming in and out, it's just awkward and costly, and to have a human standing there doing the screening is just not an efficient way to do it," Miller said.

The product is especially beneficial in places such as nursing homes, which also need to monitor visitors, said Cathy King, executive vice president of Wasserstrom.

King said the company pivoted to selling technology and personal protective equipment when the pandemic struck in order to stay relevant. It has distributed PopEntry+ to more than 100 businesses, and has even installed the system at its Broad Street location on the East Side as essential workers continued working there, King said.

"It is something that it's another tool in your toolbox to really try to keep your employees safe in this time of pandemic," she said.

Ohio company Silco Fire and Security, with offices in Grove City, also added thermal imaging and facial recognition services to its business. The company, which typically provides fire inspection and security services, expanded its surveillance offerings when the pandemic struck, President David Fraser said.

"Our purpose that we talk about a lot as a company—it's written all over our walls, really—is to protect people and property. That's really everything that we do. It's our function to society as a business. We started really wondering, 'What else can we do to help keep our customers safe?'" Fraser said.

The company offers two kinds of technology: a tablet that can attach to a wall or kiosk to take someone's temperature and detect whether they are wearing a mask; and a larger camera that can take the temperature of up to 32 people at once.

Silco began marketing its technology in late April and has provided it to museums including the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, as well as schools, day-care centers, a bakery, a church, the Union County courthouse and manufacturing facilities.

Patriot Preparatory Academy, a K-12 public charter school on the East Side, will be installing Silco's thermal imaging cameras without facial recognition to monitor students as they enter school, superintendent Sean Smith said.

The school, which will begin the year completely online for its projected 739 students, felt like it had to take on more responsibility for the safety of its students once they return, Smith said. Cameras will monitor students as they enter the building, and those with a fever will have their health assessed.

"Rather than actually stopping every student and putting a temporal scanner to their forehead, I feel like this is a way that's not as invasive, that's maybe not as intimidating to a student to be able to arrive to school and also kind of monitor their general health," Smith said.

Fraser said the technology isn't a "silver bullet" against the virus: The cameras are for indoor use only because they need to be in a temperature-stable environment; and some people with COVID-19 are asymptomatic and don't have a fever, Fraser said.

"It's just an additional safety precaution that businesses can take to help keep customers or guests safe," Fraser said.

Miller said PopEntry+ technology can be adapted in a post-pandemic world to eliminate the need for key cards and fobs, instead using facial recognition to gain access to secure locations. The company also is implementing a facial recognition payment system that can be used at restaurants and retailers.

"Health screening is just the entry point for us," Miller said.

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Citation: Facial recognition, thermal imaging part of future with coronavirus (2020, July 31)
retrieved 20 April 2024 from

<https://techxplore.com/news/2020-07-facial-recognition-thermal-imaging-future.html>

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