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RSA SecurID token beefed up with smart card reader

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Companies that rely on two-factor authentication in the form of tokens or smart cards are being afforded convenience, investment protection and an enhanced security solution following the international launch of the SecurID ComboReader by RSA Security.

Scheduled to be available in SA in March, the device is the first to combine RSA's standard SecurID digital two-factor authentication token with a mobile, standards-compliant smart card reader. This has major positive implications for the adoption of two-factor authentication security solutions.

"Generally speaking, the most effective approach to authentication - the business of verifying that someone is who they say they are when transacting in a digital environment - combines something a user has and something a user knows ... hence the `two-factor` moniker," explains Peter Burgess, the territory manager for sub-Saharan Africa at RSA Security.

In the case of a SecurID token, the key fob-sized unit - synchronised with a software server resident on the customer's back-end system - generates a unique pass code every 60 seconds; this is the part that the user `has`. This tallies with a user-identified PIN code only valid for that particular token; this is the part that the user `knows`.

"Only when the user enters the PIN and the pass code for that 60 second period is access granted. The combination of these factors means SecurID can accurately authenticate a user requesting access to a protected system or application," says Burgess. "Smart cards can be used in a similar way, combining something the user has [the card, swiped through a reading device] and something the user knows [a PIN]."

Combining the two security technologies into a single unit brings significant benefits to existing or potential users of two-factor authentication solutions.

"A company that is perhaps planning to implement smart cards further down the line but needs two-factor authentication now can invest in the ComboReader with little worry. The immediate need is met and there's a clear transition path to the future technology within the unit," notes Burgess.

There's a great return on investment angle as well. Traditionally, equipping users with smart card readers - or ensuring there's a reader on each PC or system access point - was time-consuming and expensive. However, the ComboReader means that users are no longer obligated to have a reader installed on each computer they work from - be it at the office, at home or when mobile.

Support for serial or USB connectivity means that a user can unplug from a serial connection to a Windows NT workstation at the office and plug the same device in again at home using USB cable on a Windows 2000 PC," says Burgess.

There`s more to the return on investment though. Smart cards provide enhanced security for e-business and they offer a secure platform for multiple applications including system access, corporate IDs and building access. The ComboReader allows companies to deploy RSA`s token technology today while working towards a smart card deployment that will distribute the total cost of ownership over time and several applications.

"The RSA SecurID ComboReader represents a convenient, logical step for companies to transition from token-based authentication products to PKI and digital certificates," adds Burgess.

The RSA SecurID system is the world`s leading two-factor user authentication solution, relied upon by thousands of organisations worldwide to protect valuable network resources. Used in conjunction with RSA ACE/Server software, the RSA SecurID ComboReader functions like an ATM card for a corporate network, requiring users to identify themselves with two unique factors - something they know and something they have - before they are granted access. More than 10 million people around the world use RSA SecurID authenticators to securely access VPN and Remote Access applications, Web servers, network operating systems and wireless networks.

The RSA SecurID ComboReader will be available in SA through the vendor`s local network of distributors and channel partners. For more information on the product, visit www.rsasecurity.com/products/securid. A complete list of RSA Secured partners is available at www.rsasecurity.com/partners/secured.

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