

Using Your Face to Unlock Your Phone: a PI's thoughts on the iPhone X

If Apple makes facial information useful by incorporating it into iPhone technology, there will soon be other applications as well.

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, October 15, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Apple recently announced the new features on its new deluxe model of the iPhone, the iPhone X. The star feature is the introduction of facial recognition software. From the people who brought you the fingerprint as a means of unlocking the phone, we now have a phone that recognizes its owner's face.

Apple tested the feature extensively, and even created latex mock-ups of people's faces to make sure they wouldn't unlock the phones. (They didn't.) As it's Apple, and I have enough faith in the company to use one of their computers, I'm fairly sure that the feature works. I know of no one who's had trouble with the fingerprint identification that started with the iPhone 5S. Say what you want about Apple; their products work.

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You might think that, since people see your face all the time, it's maybe the least private thing you have, but that's not true.”

John A. DeMarr PI

models.

There is no question that the fingerprint identification technology currently available is useful: it makes it easier to unlock your phone. You only need one finger. I've even done it one-handed. That may sound like a pointless convenience, but there are times when you need your phone to be open without needing to be in typing position. The fingerprint technology is also extremely efficient: it unlocks your phone faster than typing in your passcode does.



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I suspect that the facial recognition procedure will probably take more time than the fingerprint does. When you go to open the phone with your fingerprint, your finger is already on the phone. Knowing how to aim the phone so it will capture all the important details of your face is going to be an important part of the facial recognition software's functionality. At the very least, a learning curve will be involved. I'm not going to suggest that unlocking your phone with your face is going to take a full two minutes, but it doesn't sound like the kind of operation that can be accomplished as fast as the fingerprint verification that started with the 5S.

There's more to the issue than the mechanics of a phone, however.

The biggest potential problem with a phone that recognizes your face is that it involves putting more personal information out onto the Internet. Although the phone verifies [fingerprints](#) and faces on its own (it doesn't have to go and check an Apple database of users), a phone is still a "hot" device, and is still connected to the Internet. [Cybersecurity](#) is one of the things I do for a living, and it's a simple fact of the digital age that, if something is on a computer connected to the Internet, anyone determined enough can get to it. The only way to keep information truly private is to keep it offline. (A good application of this is "hard" bitcoin wallets that, for security, store your financial details in a device that is not connected to the Internet.)

Fingerprints are already a problem in that regard. The more times your fingerprint gets scanned, the more times this uniquely identifying personal information is stored in a place where a hacker can get to it. Your iPhone is only one of many places that require your fingerprint: they even require "biometric scanning" for theme park admission in Florida. I realize that there isn't an army of hackers out there with nothing better to do than to steal your (and only your) fingerprint – but is that a possibility you really want to create?

It's really not unlike leaving your door unlocked and trusting that a burglar won't rob you. Everyone's forgotten to lock the house at some point, and (at least judging from personal experience), no one's ever taken advantage of my occasional lapses in locking the door. My law enforcement experience tells me that burglars don't usually walk down the street and every door until they find one that's open – but why give the burglar that chance?

Not too long ago, I wrote about fingerprints and how they are unique to each person (identical twins do not have identical fingerprints) and are, thus, an ideal means of identifying people. I'm actually not sure whether your face is as unique an identifier as your fingerprint. They say that everybody has a doppelganger somewhere, and, while I don't believe that there is any scientific evidence to that effect, my experience as a detective has shown me that it is far, far, far easier to mistake someone based on their face than based on their fingerprints. Apple may have tested the technology nine ways to Sunday, but my training tells me to rely on fingerprints rather than faces. That suggests to me that this facial recognition feature may, indeed, just be a toy. If you are really concerned about the security of your phone, I don't think we're going to recommend using your face to unlock it.

The most basic iPhone X is going to retail for a very hefty \$999, and won't be available for pre-order until the end of October. I don't think I'm going to be the first on my block to have one.

Cybersecurity is one of our areas of expertise at John A. DeMarr PI. We have worked with cell phones to obtain evidence, and regularly assist our clients in securing their devices to the best degree possible. If you are in need of any of our services in this regard (including [TSCM](#), Tactical Surveillance Countermeasures), please don't hesitate to call us at 877-433-6277.

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