

Why the new ID cards are a safe bet

 By [Drew van Vuuren](#)

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In 2012, the government announced plans to adopt a new identification (ID) system, which would replace the existing green ID booklet with a smart electronic ID card. In May, Home Affairs Minister Naledi Pandor, stated that information technology firm Altech Card Solutions had won the contract to print and personalise the ID cards and that South Africans can expect to see the first of these being rolled out as early as July this year.



The cards come at a time when ID related criminal activity - such as the recent spate of SIM swap frauds - is at an all-time high and one of the leading fraud concerns affecting the country's telecoms and banking institutions. I personally welcome the move to a more secure form of ID, in hope that it will help to combat the high levels of fraud, which now reportedly costs our economy on average [R1 billion per year](#).

For data reliant businesses, the move is equally promising. Organisations face the daily task of determining whether their customers and clients are who they say they are, in order to eliminate opportunistic fraudsters looking for their next target. Digital security firm Gemalto, who will be providing the in card technology, have already put security concerns to rest, by assuring businesses and the public that the security precautions and technology within the card will make it difficult to copy or alter.

Laser sharp protection

Made from several polycarbonate layers merged together, the cards will be printed and personalised using a unique form of laser engraving, to imprint the information deep in the body of the various layers, rather than just on the surface. This form of imprinting will make it difficult for criminals to replicate and, as a result, any attempts will be more easily detected.

The card will also come equipped with its own micro-processor, which will encrypt user information stored on the card and

protect the data from being intercepted when used in conjunction with verification technologies and systems. A series of new authentication features will also be introduced, which involves card owners having to perform a series of steps to verify their identity, including a chip and PIN and/or biometrics, such as a fingerprint matching.

The addition of biometrics means that when cardholders use the ID, businesses and government departments will be able to validate the users' identity, by scanning their fingerprint's when they hand over the card and comparing it to the fingerprint stored on the card, to ensure a match.

The business opportunity

Organisations who rely on using personal information for the day-to-day running of the business (retail and finance industries in particular) will need to review existing servers, systems and IT protocols, in order to accommodate the new format. I can't help but feel that this is also an exciting opportunity for South African technology companies to design and provide retro-fit made services, to help protect the new format from existing and potential security threats.

Traditionally, most local organisations will use the ID number of a customer to identify them, along with key pieces of information unique to their businesses. The additional option of biometrics offers innovative businesses with the opportunity to use a composite of all the available information (national ID number, biometric information and company specific unique identifiers) to verify identity and in turn lower the risks associated with impersonation and fraud.

A safe bet

This new form of ID appears to be going to great efforts to protect personal information in comparison to its booklet counterpart. Businesses taking the opportunity to provide customers with tailor made services will help to instill a further level of customer confidence in ensuring that sensitive data will be duly protected.

Equally, the government needs to demonstrate consistent vigilance and to ensure proper information security practices are being followed, when rolling out the new format and technology next month. I believe Home Affairs and businesses alike need to maintain strong security controls, so that the confidentiality and integrity of citizen information is maintained and regular steps are being taken to reinforce back-end information security systems holding and safeguarding this data.

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