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Volume 17, Issue 5

3DCX: A Truly Hands-Free Future

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It's hard to believe that it's been a year since everything that we knew about the world went sideways. In early March 2020, people in North America were living their "normal" lives, but in less than two weeks everything changed as the COVID-19 pandemic went from an abstract concept to a daily reality in the United States. Offices closed. Stores shuttered their doors. Bustling downtowns became ghost towns overnight. Public transit systems went from crowded to empty in the blink of an eye.



It's not an exaggeration to say that the last year has been unlike anything we have seen in our lifetime. And despite vaccines, it's safe to say that we will not be going back to the way that life was prior to the pandemic. New technologies will be needed to support the way that we will live moving forward.

A wide range of industries, including retail, hospitality and commercial real estate, are facing real challenges because of COVID-19. In many cases, these challenges are quite literally existential: the number of companies that have closed in the last year is stupefying. And even with the availability of a vaccine, it's unclear what the future will bring. But the one thing that everyone knows is that once things get back to normal, they will still be far from what we've always thought of as "normal." That's where secure, private facial-recognition technologies can play a big role in reducing the likelihood of illness — and in creating peace of mind for travelers, employees, and people in their homes.

Let's look at a basic activity like going to a business meeting. Until a year ago, it was something that we all did without a care in the world. Then, because of the virus, everything completely changed. Instead of moving freely through public spaces, we were advised to remain as physically isolated from other people and inanimate objects as possible. For the last 12 months, the simple

act of going into an office building has been the equivalent of wandering through a minefield wearing a blindfold. That's because everything about going into an office represents a potential health hazard.



Keep your hands to yourself

Before the pandemic, you probably touched five to 10 different surfaces between the front door and the conference room. This includes the front door handle, the wayfinder kiosk, the sign-in pad, the elevator up button, the floor button in the elevator, the door to the upstairs private lobby, and the upstairs reception tablet. And each one of these surfaces is regularly touched by hundreds of people every single day. This may have been fine prior to COVID-19, but it presents unacceptable risks during a pandemic because no amount of cleaning can keep these areas safe. As soon as they are disinfected, a whole new group of people repeats the process.

How is it possible for office buildings to remain open in a world where we are advised not to touch anything? The unfortunate reality is that it isn't. Walk down any main street in the US, and you will see offices full of computers and furniture, but few — if any — people inside. It's simply too risky to attempt anything more than having a skeleton crew on site. This is bad for the economy, bad for employees, and is ultimately not sustainable. Is it even possible to attempt to go back to normal in a world where touching a door handle can cost lives?

The good news is that facial recognition technologies can solve most of the issues involved with public surfaces. Let's look at something as basic as a reception desk. Instead of asking people to sign in on a clipboard or tablet, new technologies allow people's photos to serve as their primary form of identification. Not only does this eliminate the need to touch surfaces that other people have been contacting all day, but it can actually improve security. That's because 3D facial recognition technology is far more accurate than other forms of security. By implementing solutions like this, property owners and companies can reap the benefits of lower infection risk and increased safety.

This is just one possible use case, but just about every interaction that requires a physical connection can be replaced with a remote experience driven by facial recognition. For example, people picking up prescriptions can simply look into a camera to verify their identities rather than pull out their drivers' licenses, hand them to the pharmacist, and sign physical documents. Guests checking into hotels can bypass the entire front desk procedure and go directly to their rooms without touching a single public surface. The possibilities are endless.

Security, privacy, and data integrity

Many people have opinions about facial recognition technology. Some see it as a way to make our lives more efficient, while others see it as a potential source of abuse. Like most technologies, it is inherently value-neutral. It simply does what it is programmed to do. In order for facial recognition to gain acceptance, people need to feel comfortable that their identities will remain safe. In fact, it can be argued that requiring people to tap or swipe their ATM cards is a lot less secure than using facial recognition in an office building, but in certain circles the bias against facial recognition remains. So how can property managers and business owners reap the advantages of this technology while behaving ethically and with integrity?

It all starts with consent. Just as we consent to sharing our home addresses every time we write a check, and just as we consent to sharing our bank information on the Internet every time we pay a bill, we also need to give consent to allow our faces to be used as a form of identification. Responsible organizations need to take this into account when they are designing their security systems.

Equally important is what will happen to the data after it is no longer needed. For example, if I have a meeting in a downtown New York office building on March 12, there is no need for the property company to have access to any of my information after I leave. Organizations need to have strict protocols on disposing of unnecessary images and data. Not only is this not a pipe dream, it is actually the norm for most forms of security that are in use today. Do you really think that an apartment complex keeps your license plate on file forever after you visit? It's sort of the equivalent of the dreaded "permanent record" that your junior high school principal warned you about: in most cases, it's not a real thing.

There is no single technology that will mitigate the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic — or future pandemics. Social distancing will exist in some form for quite a while, and it is naïve to think that the world will simply snap back to where it was before the virus raged out of control. But by implementing sensible precautions to minimize the risk of disease transmission, responsible organizations can play a critical role in keeping all of us healthy and safe, now and in the future.