Father of RSA tech has new way to secure your computer — using your smartphone

Ken Weiss founded the company now known as RSA and invented its signature security product, the widely used authentication token SecurID, more than two decades ago. But that was long before the emergence of the smartphone — a device that could make authenticating yourself radicallly more secure and convenient, Weiss said in an interview.

His current company, Newton, Mass.-based Universal Secure Registry, is now close to debuting smartphone-based authentication tech for consumers. Possible users, Weiss said, might include parents who want to keep their kids off their computer.

The technology works like this: When a user has satisfied several conditions on their smartphone, the phone will automatically unlock the user's computer when they are near it (and lock it when they leave the vicinity).

Those conditions are biometric identification (fingerprint recognition for iPhones and facial recognition for Android phones) and a password (entered into an app from Universal Secure Registry).

When the conditions are met, the phone will generate a random passcode and send a wireless signal that locks or unlocks the computer. The passcode can only be used once, thus making it virtually impossible for others to breach the technology, Weiss said.

Weiss received a patent for the technology in December, and says the Android product is now in testing while the iPhone product is in development. The company aims to commercially release the products to consumers by the end of the second quarter, he said.

Universal Secure Registry is targeting consumers first, rather than businesses, with the goal of quickly getting broad interest in the technology, Weiss said. While the product won't be free, the plan is for it to be inexpensive, he said.

“We want to get tens of millions of people using this,” Weiss said. “Then as we gain notoriety and trust, we’ll offer the product with more features for businesses.”

Founded in 2000, Universal Secure Registry is self-funded, and has been developing the technology for the past six years, Weiss said.

Eventually, he predicts this type of technology will find a much broader use.

“I believe it is likely in the future that this same technology will not only get you into your computers, but it can also unlock your security system for your home, unlock your car, and also become part of the cashless society,” Weiss said.


The company later took the name RSA, and the Bedford, Mass.-based firm was acquired by Hopkinson, Mass.-based EMC in 2006 for $2.1 billion.