



Anthony Russo, Chief Scientist and Founder, Atrua

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Ever wanted to give your cell phone the finger? Anthony Russo is way ahead of you.

A Brooklyn-born pattern-recognition expert, Russo was 30 when he became the youngest person ever to earn the title "Bell Labs distinguished member of technical staff." His latest distinction is having created Atrua, the first firm to focus exclusively on fingerprint recognition (or "haptics") technology's toughest application: cell phones.

Russo expects to see Atrua's 1-mm thick haptic sensor strips in the handsets of major manufacturers as early as July, but more noticeably throughout the rest of the year. Ultimately the haptic strip will replace the four-way navigation bar on phones, he said. "Instead of being limited to up-down-left-right, you can go in any direction, more like a touch pad. It's a much different experience."

Gaming will be affected almost immediately, he said. At first, users might play, say, driving games by rotating their finger left and right like a steering wheel. But the flexibility of finger control will soon enable a whole new class of games, he said. "It will revolutionize the gaming experience on these phones."

Before too long, haptics will replace passwords. Just swipe your index finger to log in to your Yahoo mail account, your middle finger for corporate e-mail, and you're in. Eventually users will make m-commerce purchases with their pinkies rather than their credit cards, safe from identity theft since the fingerprint never leaves the phone.

The size and price of haptic phones will be "consistent" with conventional phones, the company claims, and the haptic system rarely errs. In Atrua's tests, the odds of a "false-accept" failure (the phone mistaking a stranger for its owner) were less than one in 100,000.

And the odds of a "false-reject" failure (mistaking the owner for a stranger) were about four in 1000. So you'd have to give your phone the finger quite a few times before your phone gave it back to you, a pattern Russo probably didn't pick up in Brooklyn.