On the Record with Kevin McKenna, CEO of Authentix

Almost one year ago, Authentix completed the acquisition of the authentication operations of the Canadian group Meta Materials, specifically involving Nanotech Security Corp, for circa $10 million.

This acquisition was part of a series of strategic moves that have transformed Authentix from a provider of fuel integrity taggants into a comprehensive provider of authentication and traceability solutions. Previous acquisitions include Royal Joh Enschedé (2023), Security Print Solutions (2019), Traceless (2020), and Strategic IP Information (2021).

Authentication & Brand News™ sat down with Kevin McKenna, CEO of Authentix, to discuss the company's evolving strategy, its role in banknotes and beyond, and the future of product authentication and tax stamp programmes.

Q: *To begin, could you share a little about your background and how you came to lead Authentix?*

A: I joined Authentix in 2012 and worked in a range of leadership roles supporting oil and gas companies, brands, central banks, and governments with fiscal marking programmes. In 2018, I became President and CEO, leading our global efforts to secure products and supply chains.

Before Authentix, I held executive roles at HID Global, LaserCard, and L1 Identity Solutions, which is now part of IDEMIA. I began my civilian career at IBM Global Services in business development, but before that, I graduated from West Point and served seven years as a US Army aviation officer. That's where I really started.

Q: *Authentix is preparing to celebrate its 25th anniversary, but the company's history goes back further. Can you tell us about its legacy?*

A: That's right. Authentix was created in 2003 through the merger of two companies – Isotag and Biocode – both specialising in fuel authentication. Isotag was founded by a former Exxon executive using technology from Los Alamos Labs, while Biocode was a Royal Dutch Shell spinoff. Both date back to the early 1990s, so our legacy stretches back more than 30 years.

We began as a chemistry-led authentication provider for fuels, but over time, we've diversified. Today, we offer covert and overt features, high-speed sensors, secure printing, and cloud-based platforms for central banks, governments, and commercial brands that turn authentication data into actionable intelligence.

Q: *In recent years, Authentix has made several acquisitions. What is the strategy behind these?*

A: Our acquisitions have been very deliberate. The goals are threefold: to expand our technology base, diversify our revenue by sector and geography, and accelerate our move to a platform- and data-led model.

Since 2017, we've completed five acquisitions. In 2019, we bought Security Print Solutions, adding secure printing for tax stamps and other secure documents. In 2020, during the pandemic, we acquired Traceless Authentication from Kodak, which expanded both our market share and covert marker capabilities. In 2021, we acquired New Delhi based Strategic IP Information, providing us with strong online brand protection services and rights enforcement capabilities. Later in 2023, we acquired Royal Joh Enschedé, a historic security printer with over 400 years of experience. This directly enhanced our expertise in secure document printing, especially in international postage stamp markets. Most recently, in July 2024, we acquired the assets of Nanotech Security from Meta Materials, adding cutting-edge nano-optic overt security features for banknotes, IDs, and brand protection.

All these deals were funded through internal cash flow, without new equity from our owners.

Q: *Speaking of Royal Joh Enschedé, how was the experience of acquiring such a historic company?*

A: Remarkable. They have centuries of experience in secure printing – famously even printing Mozart's sheet music – and more than 200 years in tax stamp printing. That expertise has strengthened us in government documents, fiscal marking, postage stamps, passports, and diplomas, all of which still need high security in physical form.

Q: *Do you see this trend of acquisitions as part of a wider industry consolidation?*

A: Yes. Particularly in brand protection, there are many small niche providers and only a few companies with real scale. The industry is ripe for consolidation, and we expect and welcome more of it.

Q: *How do you describe Authentix's portfolio today, and do you see physical features as still essential alongside digital traceability?*

A: We combine physical and digital solutions. Customers want answers, not just technology – they want to know if their supply chain is secure and, if not, what they should do.

Physical features remain vital because they anchor digital traceability and provide visible proof of authenticity. Demand for layered solutions – overt, covert, digital, and platform intelligence – continues to be strong.

Q: *Which markets offer the greatest growth potential?*

A: We see strong demand across currency, tax stamps, and brand protection. With our new nano-optic overt security features, banknotes are a major growth opportunity over the next five years. Tax stamp demand remains robust, and brand protection continues to grow quickly thanks to our expanded digital capabilities.

Q: *Yet counterfeiting remains a major global problem. What are the biggest challenges today?*

A: There are several. First, code integrity. QR codes are everywhere, but unprotected codes are easily spoofed. We pair serialisation with physical and digital features to secure these.

Second, counterfeiters are now using AI to improve their attacks. We fight back with AI-driven analytics and machine learning, especially in our online brand protection services.

Third, cybersecurity. Authentication platforms generate sensitive data, so we build them with strong access controls, monitoring, and intrusion detection.

Finally, field reliability. Authentication must be quick and seamless, without slowing commerce. Our devices and features are designed to be fast, easy to use, and difficult to spoof. Our nano-optic overt features, for instance, are highly visible, secure, and resilient.

Q: *What about sustainability?*

A: It's an ongoing priority. Many governments are mandating traceability for supply chain transparency, and we're investing in platforms to support that. Internally, we focus on reducing emissions and waste.

Continued on page 5 >

Decoding Ballot Security: Trump Pushes for Watermarked Paper

In Authentication & Brand News™, March 2024, we reported on the US state of Georgia's decision to adopt watermarks and reject QR codes on ballot papers. In May 2025, we highlighted Mohave County's approval to add security features to its ballots for the 2026 midterm elections, in an effort to restore voter trust.

Now, US President Donald Trump has announced he will lead a movement to eliminate mail-in ballots and voting machines, claiming that both enable voter fraud.

'I am going to lead a movement to get rid of mail-in ballots, and also, while we're at it, highly inaccurate, very expensive, and seriously controversial voting machines, which cost 10 times more than accurate and sophisticated watermark paper, which is faster, and leaves no doubt, at the end of the evening, as to who won, and who lost, the election,' Trump wrote on his social media platform.

Trump said he plans to begin his effort by signing an executive order ahead of the 2026 midterms, though any such move would almost certainly face legal challenges.

Republican figures have long promoted claims of fake ballots being introduced during the 2020 election. Yet multiple audits and court rulings upheld the results, confirming the victories of President Joe Biden and Governor of Arizona Katie Hobbs. Despite the lack of evidence, the narrative of widespread fraud has continued to gain traction – especially in conservative counties such as Mohave.

The US Constitution grants state legislatures the authority to set the 'times, places and manner' of elections, subject to congressional oversight. While states have taken varied approaches, California has long watermarked its ballots, and Georgia and parts of Michigan have recently followed suit with similar features.

In Arizona, State Senator Mark Finchem has been an outspoken advocate for ballot security measures, including legislation requiring security marks on all ballots. His latest proposal, Senate Bill 1123, was vetoed by Governor Hobbs, who argued that existing infrastructure already ensures fair and secure elections.

Paper ballots, including their security features, are becoming increasingly important for guaranteeing confidence in election outcomes. If there is any doubt about the accuracy of electronic counts, election officials can fall back on the paper record for confirmation.

Trump's latest announcement underscores how Republican support for enhanced ballot security – especially the use of watermarks – is gaining momentum nationwide.

... On the Record

Our covert markers are environmentally safe. In fuels, additives are designed to combust fully without altering fuel quality. It's about being a responsible global citizen, but it also makes financial sense to build sustainable practices into the business.

Q: *Looking ahead, what trends will shape the authentication industry in the next decade?*

A: The biggest is the convergence of physical and digital – multi-layered solutions are now essential. Policy-driven traceability is another: governments are mandating supply chain transparency, which creates growth for providers like us.

AI is also reshaping the field. Beyond fighting counterfeiters, it enables spectral analysis, image recognition, and natural language processing to detect counterfeits and monitor eCommerce. IoT and smart packaging – using RFID, NFC, dynamic QR codes, and digital product passports – will also transform authentication, enabling digital twins and real-time tracking.

Q: *And where does Authentix fit into this future?*

A: We've been running SaaS-based platforms since 2003 alongside physical features. Our strength is in combining security features with intelligence, giving customers actionable insights.

Every customer is different, so customisation is key. Our philosophy is to make customers successful, invest in R&D, and make acquisitions when needed. That approach has worked for decades and will continue.

Q: *Finally, what advice would you give to brand owners when developing anticounterfeiting strategies?*

A: Start with a risk-based analysis. Ask what you are protecting, what the threat is, and what your business objective should be. Only then choose the technology.

The danger is to pick a feature first – a hologram or digital tool – and assume it solves everything. It rarely does. The strategy should drive the technology, not the other way around.

Vietnam Launches National Product ID and Traceability Programme

Vietnam has developed a government-backed national product identification and traceability solution known as NDATrace ('NDA' stands for 'National Digital Authentication') to address the increasing issue of counterfeit and substandard goods in the country. The solution aims to combine previously fragmented systems into a single, trusted platform for data verification across government and private sectors.

In 2024, Vietnam reported handling over 47,000 cases of counterfeit or fraudulent products, with a significant increase observed on eCommerce platforms and social media, according to the National Numbering and Barcodes Centre.

NDATrace has been developed by the National Data Association to address this worsening problem. The solution will be managed by the Data Innovation and Exploitation Centre, which operates under the Ministry of Public Security.

NDATrace consists of an international-standard unique identifier (UID) applied to individual products in the form of a QR code or RFID chip. The UID, along with information such as product type, batch, and expiry date, are registered on NDAChain, Vietnam's National Digital Authentication blockchain.

Each supply chain actor is required to scan the UID as the product makes its way from manufacturing to retail, in order to create a blockchain event trail. For this purpose, manufacturers, distributors, shippers, customs, and retailers are issued with their own Dentralised Identifier (DID), which is tied to Vietnam's national eID system for authenticity and identity verification. This means that every scan is not anonymous, but cryptographically signed by a verified participant.

Continued on page 6 >