Storing Fingerprints

Storing and identifying the digitized version of millions of fingerprints is an almost inconceivably enormous task. Uncompressed, the FBI's current fingerprint files would consist of 200 terabytes (200,000,000,000,000 bytes). A new piece of mathematics, wavelets, makes data compression fast, relatively routine, and much less expensive so that storage is feasible and retrieval is fast.

Photograph courtesy of Christopher M. Brislawn, Los Alamos National Lab.

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