RFID Technology – Taking Notes from Orwell

Chris Fox, Managing Editor

Radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology has been a controversial issue for quite some time, but for one reason or another, nobody seems to be talking about it – at least not very loudly. Consider this my mountain-top proclamation.

RFID seems legitimate. The technology has revolutionized everything from supply-chain management to lost pets. Who can knock that? Homeward Bound would have been much shorter if even one of the pets had RFID chips – and they certainly wouldn't have been lost again in San Francisco. Really, there is nothing bad about this tech in theory. Warehouses can track their inventory for reasonably low cost, retailers can make sure unpaid merchandise stays in the store, and lost animals can be returned home without run-ins with grizzly bears.

My concern with RFID technology is like that of any other quickly progressing technology (Google technology, Apple iPhones, etc.), the saying, "One man's tool is another man's weapon" is painfully accurate. It's responses like this that drive my concern about RFID:

I am a traditional skeptic, so I don't submit myself to conspiracy theories or outlandish accusations (even if awkward evidence sometimes alludes to Big Foot's existence). In this industry, more than most, we know what goes into electronic devices and the software development that occurs when designing even the smallest consumer electronic apparatus, as well as the technology's capabilities.

RFID is a technology designed to track you. Various software delves into many ways of tracking, such as GPS, gas station transactions, or even how many times you go to the bathroom at work. I doubt that would be completely legal, but the possibility is viable. It'd also help attain data on whether or not coffee truly improves productivity.

Some people really don't care. The phrase, "I've got nothing to hide," is reminiscent

in this situation. To reference the YouTube video above, when somebody like Adam Savage from Mythbusters has to speak with the lawyers of all the major credit card companies before they can even talk with an RFID maker, chills roll up my spine.

Again, what's the big deal if you've got nothing to hide? In reality, if you don't have anything to hide, right now, it isn't a big deal, so I might be getting my undies in a bunch for no reason. It's the capabilities of this technology that draw both inspiration and worry. RFID technology has the capability to revolutionize medical technology, robotics technology… let's be honest, everything. At the same time, RFID has the potential to quickly and easily drive us into an Orwellian state. It may seem cliché, and perhaps it is, but when schools are already using RFID to know where students are at all times (http://www.pddnet.com/news/2012/12/texas-student-tracking-chip-suit-back-court [1]), it isn't a far reach to say that our government (or creditors for that matter) longs to follow our movements.

Some might think this is a good idea. If we all carry several forms of ID already, what's one more? Plus, it could assist in the apprehension of criminals, as you don't need to physically view the RFID chip as you do a driver's license or other ID. The issue, in this manner of speaking, derives from our constitutional rights to freedom from tyranny.

There are many dangerous roads RFID has the potential to head down. Take the philosophical implications of movies like *I, Robot* (or the book) or *2012: A Space Odyssey*. In these flicks, the robots thought they knew what was best for the humans based on a logical system of deduction. The humans, obviously, disagree. What's to say a computer or a mass collection of people know what is best for a larger mass of people based on collected data? Take the incredible efficiency of our congress as an example (Can you feel the dripping sarcasm? I hope so). Nobody knows what is right for an individual better than that individual (there are some exceptions, of course, we're not robots).

The possibility to track our every action is already here – the implementation just hasn't occurred – as far as we know. Like any tech-hungry consumer, I will always long for the latest and greatest device (I have yet to buy a tablet, but that doesn't mean I don't want one), so without a second thought, I may buy myself into the RFID tracking by creditors, advertisers, and, perhaps, our government. I'm at an ethical crossroads. I want new technology, but I don't want it to track me. I find it immoral and over-engineered.

So what are we to do if we want this delicious new technology, but don't like the terms of use? Speaking up is the only method. Talking about RFID in the open makes it more transparent, and forces companies and our government to address the hacking and tracking concerns of this technology. Find a mountain, and proclaim.

What are your thoughts about RFID technology and its implications? Comment below or email chris.fox@advantagemedia.com [2].

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