

OSA Newsletter April 2007

RFID Tags: Smart Idea or Invasion of Privacy?

Imagine living in a world where you could be track by the pair of shoes that you just purchased at Wal-Mart or by a sweater that you just purchased at the Gap. Without your knowledge, the product you purchased just might be carrying a chip the size of a flake of pepper. These chips are known as RFID (Radio Frequency Identity Chips) and they could be heading to a supermarket near you.

RFID's is a controversial technology that uses tiny microchips to track items from a distance. These chips have been given the name "spy chips" as each of these chips contain a unique identification number. It allows for things such as a Social Insurance number to be read silently and undetected by radio waves. These chips can be placed just about anywhere. From clothing tags to missiles and to pet tags to the food that we eat, anywhere that a unique identification system is needed or required. Essentially, these tags can carry simple information such as a pet owners name and address or the cleaning instructions on a sweater.

RFID's tags, on the whole, are a very useful and from a technology point of view, a very intriguing idea. These tags allow retailers to reduce inventory as well as reducing the number of thefts. They are also very useful in automobile assembly plants. They are used to move cars through an assembly line and at each stage of production the RFID tag tells the computer what the next stage of production should be.

In theory these chips are a great idea, but as consumers we have a right to know whether or not the item that we have just purchased has a RFID tag. Retailers need to provide the consumer with information that the product that they just purchased contains one of these RFID tags. Once the product leaves the store product is no longer a part of the inventory and therefore the RFID tag should somehow be disabled. One could only imagine the danger these tags presented if they were to stay active once they left the store. The individual who just purchased that product could potentially be tracked to their home and it is at this point that a persons privacy becomes the main issue. Sure these tags are a great idea but where do we draw the line between efficiency and someone's privacy.

The RFID tags at this point are not ready for mass consumer production and at present are not on many of the products that we purchase. There are companies however that would like to start using these chips in the near future. If companies are going to use these tags to keep track of their products, they should be placed in plain site of the consumer so that they know exactly what they are looking at. Companies should also consider putting these tags on the packaging of the product rather than the product itself. Be sure to check out the "Hot Tips" section for just a few of the companies that are listed as sponsors the RFID technology.

There is no doubt that the face of technology is constantly changing. We have a world of information at our fingertips that we didn't have 10 to 20 years ago. These RFID tags are all well and good, however, when our privacy is put into question, we really need to sit back and take a second look. Besides, does the whole world really need to know what is going on in our lives?

About the 1st Issue:

We have waited until we could do this newsletter the right way, it is much the same way everything at the OSA Network of websites is simple in design and easy to use and full of great content and relevant subjects.

We hope you enjoy the first edition and continue to support us by promoting this and all the other services the we have to offer to you, your family, and your friends.

This first issue is sure to turn your world up side down, especially if you have not heard about or do not understand exactly what RFID stands for or what your future holds for you. Begin now to be more involved in knowing how technology driven e-commerce and governmental agencies control how RFID will change our future and how it will affect people across the globe.

All my best to you and your family, in 2007!

Bill Wardell

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