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TRACKING EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE

» THE RFID THREAT «

RFID will have a pervasive impact on every aspect of civilization, much the same way the printing press, the industrial revolution and the Internet and personal computers have transformed society. . . . RFID is a big deal. Its impact will be pervasive, personal and profound. It will be the biggest deal since Edison gave us the light bulb.

—Rick Duris,

Frontline Solutions Magazine, December 2003¹

Technology . . . is a queer thing. It brings you great gifts with one hand, and it stabs you in the back with the other.

—C.P. Snow, *New York Times*, 1971²

Imagine a world of no more privacy.

Where your every purchase is monitored and recorded in a database and your every belonging is numbered. Where someone many states away or perhaps in another country has a record of everything you have ever bought, of everything you have ever owned, of every item of clothing in your closet—every pair of shoes. What's more, these items can even be tracked remotely.

Once your every possession is recorded in a database and can be tracked, you can also be tracked and monitored remotely through the things you wear, carry, and interact with every day.

We may be standing on the brink of that terrifying world if global corporations and government agencies have their way. It's the world that Wal-Mart,

Target, Gillette, Procter & Gamble, Kraft, IBM, and even the United States Postal Service want to usher in within the next ten years.

It's the world of radio frequency identification.

Radio frequency identification, RFID for short, is a technology that uses tiny computer chips—some smaller than a grain of sand—to track items at a distance. If the master planners have their way, every object—from shoes to cars—will carry one of these tiny computer chips that can be used to spy on you without your knowledge or consent. We've nicknamed these tiny devices "spychips" because of their surveillance potential.

▶▶ "THE PRIVACY IMPACT OF LETTING
MANUFACTURERS AND STORES PUT RFID
CHIPS IN THE CLOTHES, GROCERIES, AND
EVERYTHING ELSE YOU BUY IS ENORMOUS."

—CALIFORNIA STATE SENATOR
DEBRA BOWEN³ ◀◀

If you've been staying in touch with the news about RFID, you may already know who we are and something of the public battles we have fought to try to keep this technology off of consumer products and out of our homes. In case you don't know who we are and why we can make such claims with conviction, an introduction is in order.

We are Katherine Albrecht, founder and director of CASPIAN (Consumers Against Supermarket Privacy Invasion and Numbering), and Liz McIntyre, the organization's communications director. CASPIAN is a grass-roots organization that has been tackling consumer privacy issues since 1999.* In the pages that follow, we'll give you a ringside seat to some of the battles we've fought with companies like Benetton, Gillette, and retail giant Tesco. You'll see why

* With close to ten thousand members in all fifty U.S. states and over thirty countries worldwide, CASPIAN seeks to educate consumers about marketing strategies that invade their privacy and to encourage privacy-conscious shopping habits across the retail spectrum.

Advertising Age says our presence has been felt from Berlin to Bentonville (corporate home of Wal-Mart), and you'll also learn how we uncovered plans by companies to track consumers around stores, use RFID to spam consumers with personalized advertising, and even monitor what people do in their own homes.

We're also suburban moms who've taken on some of the largest corporations in the world because we care about the future our children will inherit if this dangerous technology is unopposed. We believe consumers should know what's in store so we can work together to protect our privacy and civil liberties before it's too late.

We know that a Big Brother vision of the future sounds farfetched. We didn't believe it ourselves until we saw with our own eyes and heard with our own ears companies detailing their mind-boggling plans. We assure you that this seemingly impossible future is on the drawing board, and we promise that by the time you finish this book, you will be convinced, too.

For nearly three years, we have devoted ourselves full-time to combing every article, reading every white paper, pursuing every insider tip, and scanning through thousands of patent documents to piece together a picture of this planned RFID future. We've attended trade shows, sat in on top level meetings, and had long talks with the people implementing these plans.

What we learned will shock you.

If anything you read in the following pages strikes you as improbable, please refer to the endnotes at the back of the book. We've included hundreds of references to original source materials that should satisfy even the most skeptical reader.

In a future world laced with RFID spychips, cards in your wallet could "squeal" on you as you enter malls, retail outlets, and grocery stores, announcing your presence and value to businesses. Reader devices hidden in the doors, walls, displays, and floors could frisk the RFID chips in your clothes and other items on your person to determine your age, sex, and preferences. Since spychip information travels through clothing, they could even get a peek at the color and size of your underwear.

We're not joking. A major worldwide clothing manufacturer named Benetton has already tried to embed RFID chips into women's undergarments. And they would have gotten away with it, too, had it not been for an international outcry when we exposed their plan. Details of the "I'd Rather Go Naked" campaign come later in the book.

While consumers might be able to avoid spychipped clothing brands for now, they could be forced to wear RFID-enabled work clothes to earn a living. Already uniform companies like AmeriPride and Cintas are embedding RFID tracking tags into their clothes that can withstand high temperature commercial washings.

Don't have to wear a chipped uniform to work? Your RFID-enabled employee badge could do the spying instead. One day, these devices could tell management whom you're chatting with at the water cooler and how long you've spent in the restroom—even whether or not you've washed your hands.

Our next generation of workers could be conditioned to obediently accept this degrading surveillance through forced early exposure. Some schools are already requiring students to wear spychipped identification badges around their necks to keep closer tabs on their daily activities. If Johnny is one minute late for math class, the system knows. It's always watching.

Retailers are thrilled at the idea of being able to price products according to your purchase history and value to the store. RFID will allow them to assess your worth as you pick up products and flash you a corresponding customer-specific price. Prime customers might pay three dollars for a staple like peanut butter while "bargain shoppers" or the economically challenged could be charged twice as much. The goal is to encourage the loyalty of shoppers who contribute to the profit margins while discouraging those who don't. After all, stores justify, why have unprofitable customers cluttering the store and breathing their air?

RFID chips embedded in passbooks and ATM cards will identify and profile customers as they enter bank lobbies, beaming bank balances to employees who will snicker at the customer with a mere thirty-seven dollars in the bank while offering white glove treatment to the high-rollers.