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~ NAS & SAN

ReadyNetGo News

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<http://www.readynetgo.net>

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TIP OF THE MONTH

For more information on identity tracking and privacy issues, check out the following groups:

www.aclu.org – American Civil Liberties Union

www.epic.org – Electronic Privacy Information Center

www.eff.org – Electronic Frontier Foundation

www.privacyrights.org – Privacy Rights Clearinghouse

www.firewallguide.com/privacy.htm - Home PC Firewall Guide

www.nocards.org – C.A.S.P.I.A.N; Consumers Against Supermarket Privacy Invasion and Numbering

www.autoidcenter.org – Learn about the industry behind Auto-ID

www.consumersunion.org/wireless/ - Wireless Watchdog group

Tracking Your Identity: What You Need To Know

Here's a scenario: You walk into a store, pick up an item, pay for it with your credit card, and a week later you receive a personalized message from the store with a similar item on sale.

Coincidence ...? Maybe not, if the Auto-ID Center keeps gaining momentum. The Auto-ID Center, a consortium of global companies and universities, is marketing a new technology that links RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) with embedded computer chips in products. This will enable computers to track goods at any point in the supply chain. The chips are extremely small, about the size of a grain of dust, so consumers will not be able to detect them.

Every piece of clothing, sports equipment, food item, and garden tool could have an ID tag in it linking the purchase to you. This new technology will be beneficial to manufacturers (shoplifting will decrease) but is it beneficial to consumers?

It all depends on how it is used. Retailers are aware that consumers will run the other way if they think "big brother" is watching so they may require that the technology be "turned off" once it leaves the store. Manufacturers, on the other hand, envision no checkout lines - customers simply wheel their carts past a device that links their purchase with an account on file. Convenient - yes! Private - No!

WWW (Websites Worth Watching)

1. www.deliciousdecisions.org - Sponsored by the American Heart Association, this website features recipes and information for fighting heart disease and strokes.
2. www.smart-mouth.org - Fun, interactive health and nutrition site for kids. Sponsored by CSPI - Center for Science in the Public Interest.
3. www.foodnews.org - A project of the Environmental Working Group - information on organic fruits and vegetables.

Retail Surveillance

Supermarkets, as shown in the previous example, are very intent on knowing what you buy and how much you buy. In particular, they focus most of their attention on their high margin customers. Club cards, that give consumers reduced prices on certain products, don't just track how much you spend – they track what you purchase. And if you and many other consumers purchase a particular good, you're going to see more of it in the store as well as seeing price drops for card holders. This targeted advertising goes beyond simply giving the consumer what they want. It, in effect, eliminates choice and will eventually price small to moderate buyers out of the market.

Cell Phones and Wireless

Users of wireless computers and cell phones are potentially another major target for tracking your identity. Targeted advertising is gaining ground now that the new E-911 service will be in effect by 2005. This service will be used to track cell phones within 100 feet, which will be valuable in the case of emergencies. The technology works in concert with GPS (Global Positioning Systems).

Marketers are jumping on board with this **location-based technology** by creating another market for targeted advertising. If you have a cell phone or PDA with internet access and you opt-in to receive advertisements, retailers could target you as you walk past their store by sending you a \$1 off coupon for a cheeseburger or buy one, get one free offers. The key word here is opt-in. Once you decide to receive one advertisement, you get them all regardless of the consequences. Some people won't mind this location-based advertising as it could potentially save them money on things they would purchase anyway. But what if your health insurer got the data and knew you ate a double cheeseburger every day ...

Government Surveillance

The **Patriot Act of 2001** [aka Domestic Security Enhancement Act of 2003] gives the government the ability to track emails as well as online searches and read personal notes in chat rooms. This surveillance is deemed necessary to thwart terrorist activities but many civil libertarians and privacy watchdog groups are worried that innocent people will be targeted. Visit the sites listed in the Tip of the Month column for more information. Much advice these days about online and email correspondence seems to boil down to a familiar phrase; if you wouldn't write it on a postcard, don't type it in an email.

(**Note:** online correspondence and transactions on a secure site with 128-bit encryption is considered very safe. Just make sure to read the privacy policy of companies with whom you do business. Policies vary widely and many companies have no concerns about sharing your personal information.)

The bottom line is that advances in communication have made all of our lives much easier and convenient – from online shopping, banking, and research to conducting international business instantaneously – technology is bringing the world to our fingertips. Consumers need to be aware, however that there are many people who will try to take advantage of this free flow of information. In this new age of computer technology, the best things that everyone can do are: become informed, ask questions and be very conscientious with the information you provide.