

One billion people to get biometrics and RFID tracking by 2015

March 30 2004

by **Jo Best**

Surveillance passports just not cricket, say civil liberties groups

Civil liberties groups from both sides of the Atlantic have joined forces to oppose the proposed introduction and cross-border sharing of biometrics and RFID in more than one billion passports worldwide. Human rights organisations from Europe, North America, Australia and Asia have sent an open letter to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) railing against plans to create an international 'identity register' that would force the inclusion of biometrics and controversial RFID tracking tags in all passports by 2015. Among the 39 groups who put pen to paper are: Privacy International, the Foundation for Information Policy Research, the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the American Civil Liberties Union.

The ICAO will be meeting in Cairo next week and will be discussing the scheme. If the ICAO approves it, facial mapping and tracking tags would become mandatory, with fingerprinting also on the drawing board, depending on the preferences of individual governments. Home Secretary David Blunkett has already proved his fondness for biometrics of all kinds when he announced late last year that there would be trials for biometric ID, with iris or fingerprint recognition potentially on the cards.

The US has also gone big on biometrics, photographing and fingerprinting visitors crossing its borders.

As well as voicing fears that the proposed database may "threaten [human] rights", the letter adds that the chosen standard of facial recognition may be unsound. "The ICAO standards do not govern the use to which the facial recognition is put but even the most reliable uses of this technology - one-to-one verification using recent photographs - have been shown in US government tests to be highly unreliable, returning a false non-match [where technology doesn't recognise people with a valid photo] rate of five per cent and a false match rate of one per cent," it says, adding that there may be the potential for oppressive regimes to get their hands on methods of surveillance that were previously inaccessible.

"We hope that the choices of biometrics have been driven primarily by logistical and commercial concerns and were not intended to facilitate the conversion of travel systems into a global infrastructure of surveillance. But we are deeply concerned that this may become their unintended consequence," it concludes.

Microsoft takes RFID lead in tech council

April 06 2004 by **CNET News.com staff**

Big software company meets big brother?

Microsoft is out to take a more formal role in the development of radio frequency identification technology.

The software giant on Monday announced that it is forming the Microsoft Radio Frequency Identification Council, which is set to hold its first meeting this month. Participants in the group include Accenture, GlobeRanger, Intermec Technologies and Provia Software. Microsoft said it will be providing a "platform," on which the partners can create RFID-based products and services, drawing on its own Windows CE operating system, SQL Server database and BizTalk Server software.

The companies will be tackling a highly touted technology still in its early stages. RFID systems combine microchips and wireless gadgetry to provide tiny tracking devices for products, with the resulting set-ups expected to streamline supply chains and help retailers keep better records of their inventory.

But the switchover from bar codes to RFID tags isn't happening as fast as some had hoped. Suppliers to retailer Wal-Mart Stores, for instance, aren't likely to meet the target Wal-Mart set for adoption of the technology, according to a recent study.

Javed Sikander, a program manager for RFID strategy at Microsoft, said: "With RFID in the early stages of adoption, we are continuing to expand and evolve our partner-driven strategy based on the needs of the industry."

Microsoft, like competitors Oracle and IBM, is working to develop middleware for RFID systems. In January, it added RFID technology to its Axapta Warehouse Management software for small and midsize businesses.

The company also said on Monday that it has joined forces with EPCglobal, an organisation that is developing RFID standards for the Electronic Product Code Network.

Oracle jumps on RFID bandwagon

March 31 2004

by **Alorie Gilbert**

And if ever there was a bandwagon that could be traced it's that one...

Oracle is looking to capitalise on the hype surrounding the controversial RFID tracking chips which are increasingly being considered by retailers as a way to track stock, despite public concerns over privacy.

Oracle has discussed plans to develop RFID middleware, joining rivals IBM, Microsoft and others in the race to release software programs specially designed to handle the deluge of data that RFID systems are expected to produce.

The information technology systems most companies use today are not equipped for a world in which billions of objects report their whereabouts in real-time, Oracle and its competitors say.

Oracle plans to build RFID data-processing capabilities into releases of its database and application server programs due out this summer. It plans to include special programs, called device drivers, in its software, said Allyson Fryhoff, vice president of Oracle Sensor-Based Services. The drivers are the technical bridge that allows computers running Oracle's software to talk to RFID readers, which wirelessly collect data about objects in within range.

Oracle is working with a number of RFID reader makers, including Alien Technology and Intermec Technologies, which develop the driver programs. Oracle is also developing a "device driver framework" that will help companies administer and build application software for their RFID systems, Fryhoff said.

Alorie Gilbert writes for News.com

RFID: You'll have it and you'll have it by 2005

April 15 2004

by **Jo Best**

If you're a retailer, that is...

While RFID may not yet have reached maturity, retailers, logistics firms and food suppliers in Europe are still planning to roll out the technology as soon as they can, according to new research. More than half the companies in the UK, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Belgium said they rated the technology as a high priority in their IT spending and are planning or currently involved in roll-outs of the trials this year, according to research from LogicaCMG. Unfortunately for those getting their projects under way this year, issues of standards and the software linking RFID with existing IT infrastructure have yet to be resolved to the industry's satisfaction.

LogicaCMG expects the technological wrinkles to be ironed out by the end of this year. A LogicaCMG spokesman said that the current problems wouldn't translate to disadvantages for the would-be early adopters.

"With all new technology, there's always issues. With RFID, there are still some weaknesses... but these are well-known," he said. "With the supply chain, everything is related. If a retailer starts using RFID, they force its adoption... You set the way RFID will be introduced." However, while pallet and crate level tagging is getting firms excited, item level tagging is still some way off - the research reckons that 2008 is the most likely date for the more extensive schemes, despite the fact that the research shows this is exactly the type of tagging that retailers want to see introduced. While tagging at pallet and crate level will mean significant cost savings for retailers in the same way that item-level tagging does, chipping products is the goal for retailers, giving them the opportunity to track items throughout the supply chain rather than just as far as the warehouse. Nevertheless, LogicaCMG believes that 2005 will be the year when RFID for retailers becomes ubiquitous. "There's a lot of hype in the IT industry," the spokesman said, "RFID is the reality - it's here to stay."

The rights and wrongs of chipping children

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by **silicon.com**

silicon.com readers hold forth

RFID has always provoked strong opinions - from supermarkets proclaiming it to be the best thing since sliced bread to privacy advocates calling for a moratorium on the technology. However, news that one Japanese school is planning to put RFID tags on it pupils and readers on school gates and other 'dangerous' locations drew a great deal of comment from silicon.com readers.

A several readers were saddened by the development, saying the trade-off between privacy and security was too great or predicting that the tagging of children in one school was the starting point of humanity in general being tagged.

Michael Litwak summed up the feelings of many of them. "Is paranoia what we wish to teach our children?" he wrote, adding: "How much restraint will the next generation show, when it's their turn to do the monitoring? Let's not sell out real liberty for the false promise of greater security." The dilemma between infringing on children's civil rights and at the same time ensuring their safety was one that perplexed even the most opposed to RFID. Reader Pete Bellamy said: "[This is] the first salvo in the war to implant chips in the world's population... But on the other hand, when a kid goes missing, the idea of being able to GPS track them is very appealing."

Nat Irvin, however, believes the sacrifice is one worth making. "For some reason, this seems to make perfectly good sense to me. Children are our most vulnerable and prized possession. Privacy is not," he wrote. Others were less convinced that the scheme had any chance of working at all, given the nature of schoolchildren. An anonymous reader wrote: "Can you imagine the chaos that could be caused by naughty children swapping schoolbags or items of clothing, or stealing items and then placing them in dangerous locations? A wonderful example of the misuse of technology."

Coleman Yee thought he had the answer to wandering children and it didn't need any tracking chips. "Cheaper solution: close the gates!"

One anonymous reader just simply couldn't see what all the fuss was about, saying: "How many of you have cardkeys? Guess what - that's RFID! This is no different than issuing a card key to each student, just like we have at work. And, just as cardkeys, you only get tracked when going through chokepoints such as entrances and exits. No big deal here - and I'd prefer people spend more time worrying about their kids' exercise habits, spelling and math."