

RFID: Will you wear it?

A consumer view of RFID in retail

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When our work began...

... this is what others said about RFID:

A company and technologist perspective:

- We can improve “product availability for customers... and make life easier for staff”
(Tesco, UK retailer)
- We are creating an “internet of things”
(Auto-ID Center, technology developer)
- radio-barcodes, smart tags

A civil liberty perspective:

- “Ultimately this technology will enslave humanity”
- We “would rather walk naked than wear clothes that have been tagged”
(Katherine Albrecht, CASPIAN)
- spy-chips

What we did...

- Held a summit at the NCC on the future of RFID in retail

What we found...

- RFID was being brought in without consumer awareness
- Although some retail uses of RFID could benefit consumers, not enough attention was paid to the possible risks

What are the main risks?

- Unwanted surveillance
- Lack of sufficient consumer protection, involvement and choice
- Sorting the haves, the have some and the have nots

What should be done?

- Regulators, here and overseas, to investigate RFID and provide guidance
- Industry to provide convincing evidence of consumer benefits and develop consumer-friendly applications
- Government and industry to set up consultative processes

A wider perspective

- There is a need to engage with consumer interests “upstream”
- The NCC’s forthcoming book, “The Glass Consumer”, will set out a broader consumer agenda

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