



MEETING TIME AND LOCATION

December 8, 2005, dinner (or just come to network) at 7:00 PM, presentation at 8:00 PM.

Denny's Restaurant
3315 N. Scottsdale Rd.
Scottsdale, AZ

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Vaughn Treude

Last month's program has provided me with a ready-made topic for this month's column. Our main speaker was Cory Miller from the Arizona branch of the American Electronics Association. She asked what we wanted her to speak about, giving us a list of potential topics. One of these was RFID, that is, Radio Frequency Identification. She spoke briefly on how it works and a bit on the controversy surrounding the technology. She mentioned that the AEA's stand was to oppose any "hasty" legislation to restrict the use of RFID.

It was especially interesting to me because I've worked in the RFID realm for two different clients, so I know something about it. RFID is useful because it allows product information to be encoded in a very small

form, which can be used by retailers as an alternative to barcodes. They are more expensive, but they provide several benefits:

1. They can store more information, and that information can be updated.
2. They can be read several inches away from the reader.
3. They can be read almost simultaneously – an entire shopping cart full of merchandise could be read in a single scan.

As with any new technology, there's a lot of apprehension in the public. Many people see it as a way to track the public via their purchases, as a frightening kind of "big brother" technology. Of course, you can remove it from an item you buy, but what if you don't know where it is, or even if it's on there?

Anyone who knows me knows that I'm practically obsessed with the idea of personal privacy. For example, I do not shop at Fry's Food Stores because I refuse to get a shopper card that would allow them to track my purchases. And the price of everything they sell is jacked up, sometimes way up, if you don't use the card. I will sometimes shop at places that don't "discount" everything, but prefer places that don't have the system at all- such as Food

City, Sprouts, and Walmart. It's ironic that the last of the three has come under fire for planning to put RFID on everything in the store.

I'm not particularly concerned about that. It's my understanding that stores can't track your purchases without your permission, which is why shopper cards exist. If I ever get paranoid about it, I'll pay cash – but that can be a pain for large purchases. In fact, I think RFID could conceivably be a privacy-enhancing technology. If a store tags items to help prevent shoplifting, that means that, theoretically at least, there's not reason for them to inspect my person or belongings – that is, unless they have a problem with false positives. Maybe it could lead Fry's Electronics to stop the practice of inspecting customers' bags at the exit, which I find to be particularly obnoxious (even if they have an attractive young woman doing the checking.)

What I'd like to see is (a) an indication or symbol on any product that uses RFID and (b) a straightforward way to remove the things after purchase. Stores might be reluctant to share this information for fear shoplifters may utilize it inside the store. If so, I'd also be happy if they use a device which disables the chip at the point of purchase. (Of course, that would considerably increase the cost of using the technology.)

One place I totally oppose RFID is its potential use for tagging human beings. I fear this will become routine, however, starting with soldiers and then with school children as a response to some overblown threat of kidnapping. (This would of course lead to kidnappers mutilating their victims

in an attempt to disable the devices.)

Although I don't believe RFID to be the grave threat that some perceive, it's a technology we need to watch carefully. Like anything, it could be used for good or evil, to increase freedom or to limit it.

On a personal note- the next meeting is our annual business meeting, in which we nominate and elect officers. If someone wants my job, or knows someone who'd do a better job, please run against me! If not (and I know that getting people to volunteer is often like pulling teeth) I'm willing to serve one (and only one) more term. I'm a strong believer in term limits!

Vaughn

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

by Clark Jones

Wow! This month I get to put in a section This has been an extremely busy weekend for me. The American Mensa Committee (the national “board of directors” for Mensa) met in Phoenix this weekend, and since I'm on the local ExCom (Executive Committee, or local “board of directors”), I felt obliged to spend as much time there as possible. There was also a “hamfest” on Saturday (at which I saw at least one other PACN member, and a lot of other friends). The “hamfest” included an ARCA (Association of Radio Clubs of Arizona) meeting, and I had to attend that as the “alternate” member for the ARA (Arizona Repeater Association). Sunday evening was the monthly Mensa ExCom meeting.

And, this month, the deadline for the Mensa newsletter is early, thanks to Christmas falling on a weekend. And, just to make things a little more interesting, Fry's Electronics had a color laser printer on sale, so I rounded up a friend of mine and we went over and got one (I can't lift it alone). So far, it has made it out of the box, but the tape on the various covers is still on it.

I do have a couple of comments on the "privacy" issue for the grocery stores and such: First of all, I was very pleased to see that Albertson's has a box on their form to the effect of "I don't want to give you my name and address, but I want a card anyway". I have cards for several other stores that I've put "pseudonyms" and fake addresses on the forms. Also, someone told me recently that some guy is trying to become the "biggest shopper at Safeway" by publishing his phone number. It seems that they will accept a phone number in lieu of the card, if the phone number is in their database.

Another aspect of those cards, though, is that the stores could be running up a horrible liability for themselves. I've heard reports on the radio that at least one store is being sued because they knew that a product that the customer had purchased had been recalled by the manufacturer, but the store did not contact them to let them know about it. (Along these lines, I have had Costco send me a letter saying that something I'd bought was recalled – unfortunately, by the time I got the letter, it had already been eaten, though to no ill effect.) As far as I know, these lawsuits have not been resolved, but if they do come down in favor of the consumer, my guess is that those cards will become a thing of the past.

Anyway, see you all Thursday!

Clark

P.S. If you'd like to become editor, it's certainly a position I feel I've held more than long enough.

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