

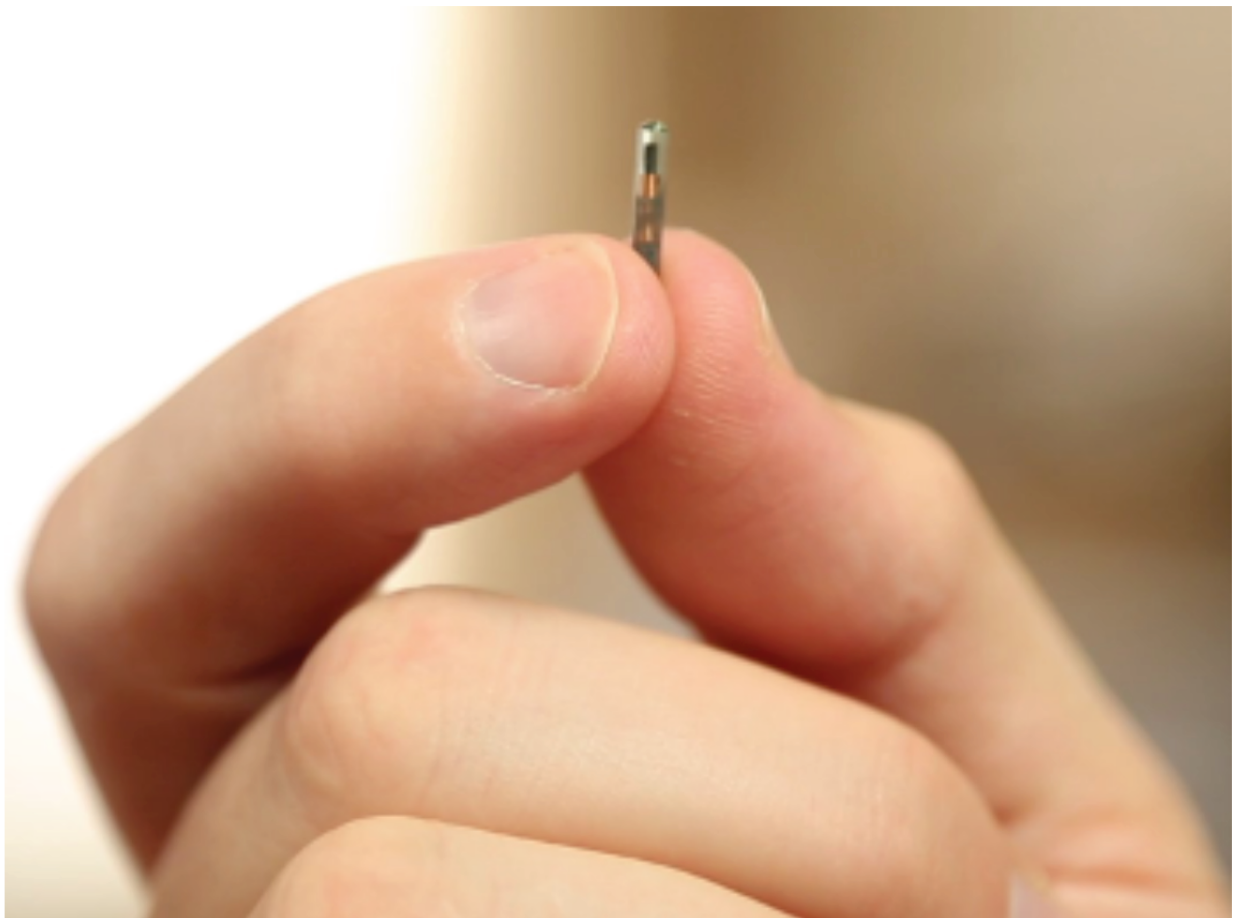


Wisconsin Company Offers To Implant Chips In Its Employees

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MERRIT KENNEDY



Chip Implant to be used by 32M.

32M

A Wisconsin company is offering to implant tiny radio-frequency chips in its employees – and it says they are lining up for the technology.

The idea is a controversial one, confronting issues at the intersection of ethics and technology by essentially turning bodies into bar codes. Three Square Market, also called 32M, says it is the first U.S. company to provide the technology to its employees.

The company manufactures self-service "micro markets" for office break rooms. It [said in a press release](#) that obtaining a chip is optional, but expects that about 50 employees will take part.

Employees who have the rice-grain-sized RFID chip implanted between their thumb and forefinger can then use it "to make purchases in their break room micro market, open doors, login to computers, use the copy machine," 32M said.

CEO Todd Westby said that the company believes the technology will soon be ubiquitous:

"We foresee the use of RFID technology to drive everything from making purchases in our office break room market, opening doors, use of copy machines, logging into our office computers, unlocking phones, sharing business cards, storing medical/health information, and used as payment at other RFID terminals. Eventually, this technology will become standardized allowing you to use this as your passport, public transit, all purchasing opportunities, etc."

The company is immediately facing questions about safety and privacy – for example, whether the technology could be used in invasive ways, like tracing employee whereabouts and monitoring the length of breaks.

"The chip is not trackable and only contains information you choose to associate with it," the company [said in a Q and A](#). "This chip does not have GPS capabilities." It added that the device has been FDA-approved for some 13 years.



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The employees themselves appear to be responding positively. For example, software engineer Sam Bengtson [told The New York Times](#) that "it was pretty much 100 percent yes right from the get-go for me. ...In the next five to 10 years, this is going to be something that isn't scoffed at so much, or is more normal. So I like to jump on the bandwagon with these kind of things early, just to say that I have it."

For employees not prepared to implant a chip in their bodies, the company is offering two other options – the same technology, placed in a wristband or a ring.

32M said that the data on the chip is "encrypted." However, Alessandro Acquisti, a professor of information technology and public policy at Carnegie Mellon University, told that *Times* that encrypted is "a pretty vague term ... which could include anything from a truly secure product to something that is easily hackable."

Last year, [NPR's Eyder Peralta](#) attended a gathering of so-called "body hackers," who advocate using implantable technology in the human body.



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As people lined up to be "chipped" with the same kind of technology as the Wisconsin company, one bystander offered this observation: "More than the crazy concept, it's actually people's willingness to accept it. That's why it's crazy to me. ...People are just willing to just line up and go, 'Yeah, stick that in me.' "

Interested in the ethical issues surrounding "body hacking?" Alva Noë, a philosopher at the University of California, Berkeley, recently wrote for NPR that issues of implant technology "direct our attention to the fact that technology does (and always has) shifted what we can do and, so, redraws the lines of human agency and responsibility." Read his [full piece here](#).