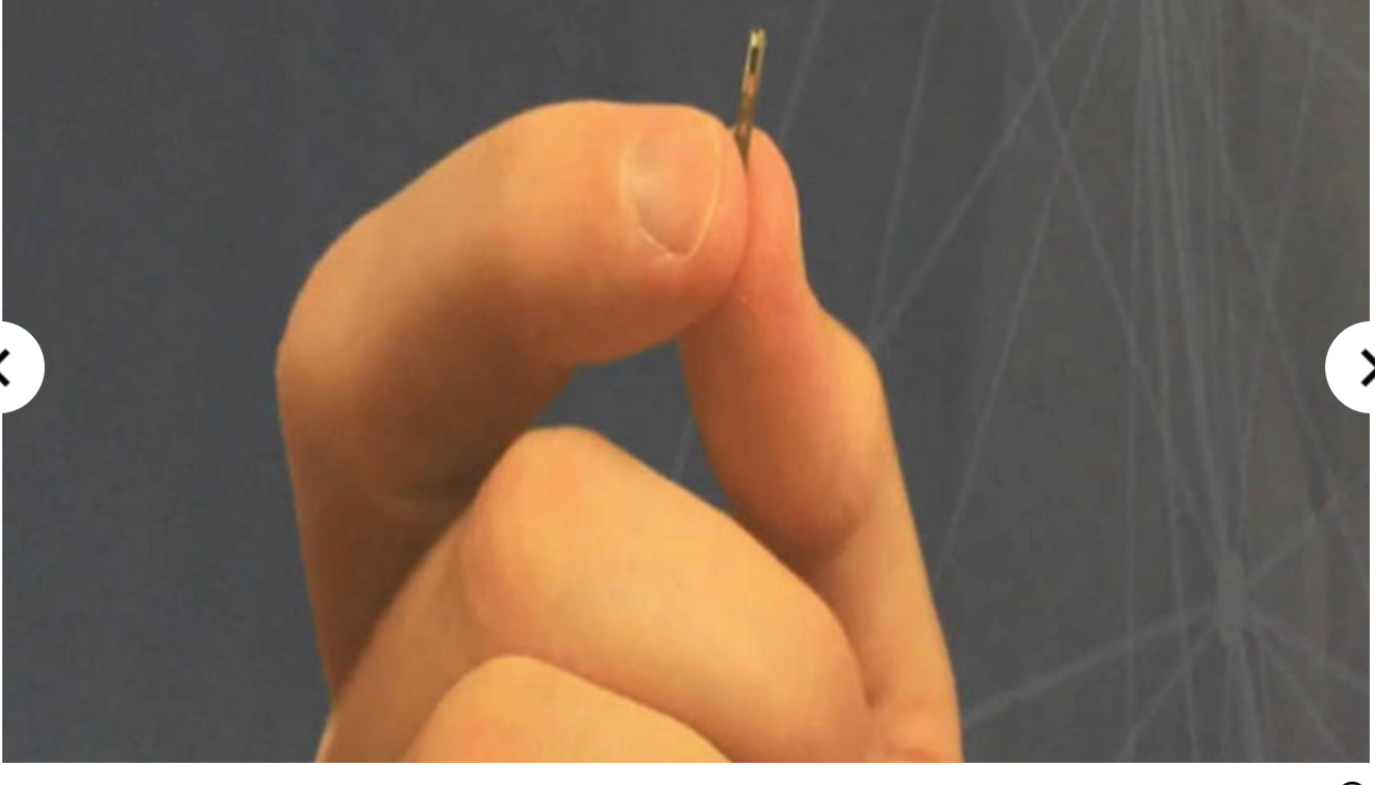


Chip implants aim to make work easier for 50 employees at this company

By [Rebecca Mariscal](#) on Aug 2, 2017 at 8:20 a.m.



1 / 3 A poster at the chip event shows what the chip itself looks like. The chip uses RFID technology similar to that used by credit cards and cell phone purchases. ⓘ

RIVER FALLS, Wis. — With a disinfecting swipe and a quick two seconds to implant, Sam Bengtson had access to his computer, cell phone, credit card and more — all in the palm of his left hand. Then he put his other hand on the table, jokingly ready to do it all again.

Bengtson, the lead developer of a microchip project at Three Square Market, had no reservations about joining about 50 other employees in volunteering to have a RFID chip implanted.

"I can understand how it can be scary," Bengtson said. "But it is very simple and very secure."

The chip is implanted using a syringe just below the skin between the thumb and forefinger.

"In a lot of ways it was easier than a shot," Bengtson said. "I mean I honestly didn't even feel it."

The RFID technology is the same as that used in credit card and cell phone purchases. Most of the technology, however, comes from outside programming and devices.

"In reality there isn't a whole lot of technology in the chip itself," Bengtson said.

The chips are secure and encrypted, and any programming of the device has to go through the company's application.

At Three Square Market, which provides micro stores inside businesses, employees that volunteered will use the chip like both a key card and a credit card — accessing the building, logging into computers and even buying items in the breakroom.

"We're just really getting into what it can do and this is what we're doing so far," CEO Todd Westby said.

For those who chose not to get a chip, wristbands or smart rings are available. Westby said some employees just weren't comfortable with it.

Katie Langer, a market executive, is one of the employees who chose not to get the chip. Though it is FDA-approved, she said she still has concerns for down the road.

"I'd just like to know more about the long-term health effects," Langer said.

As a software engineering company that currently works with micro markets and kiosks, Westby said the business is interested in the software that accompanies the chip. It's chipped its own employees to further explore how the chip can be used.

"We need to master this ourselves if we're going to take it to market," President Patrick McMullan said.

As for what the company can do with it, Westby said it's working on a variety of ideas.

"We're just really honestly having fun with it right now," he said.

Bengtson said Three Square Market wants to lead the initiative to make sure it's done as responsibly as possible.

"If we set the standard for it, others will follow," he said.

In the future, these chips may be used more often. Some of the possibilities include passports, car keys and tracking for children. Three Square Market has already seen interest from banks, hospitals and foreign governments concerned about security and safety.

"We've had over a hundred inquiries," McMullan said.

Currently the chip is valued at \$300, and has 956 kb of memory. Three Square Market hasn't determined a price for market yet.

"It's that new," Westby said.

Wide response

The action has drawn nationwide attention.

Some responses to the idea of microchipping have been critical, citing concerns over health and the information received through the chip.

The idea even drew a protester near the location of the business last week. A member from the group called F-Hate Only Love was there on July 24 and 25 and left a sign taped at the entrance of the business park warning about the chips.

McMullan, who has been chipped himself, said the chips are not GPS-enabled, so they are not used to track people. The company also said it will not collect or sell information, or use it to check if employees are doing their jobs.

"We're going to be responsible, we're going to be respectful," McMullan said.

For those still doubtful, Westby said the chip isn't for them.

"I'm looking at what it can do for people, we're all looking at that," Westby said. "There's going to be naysayers in everything."

Employee Melissa Timmins said she was initially unsure if she wanted to be chipped. She decided to participate after learning more about the technology of the chip and spoke with a representative from Allina Health about health concerns.

"I didn't want to miss out on it," she said. "So I did my research and I wanted to feel comfortable, I wanted to be 100 percent in."