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

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

Bengson, the lead developer of a robotics project at Three Square Market, had no reservations about having about 30 other employees in volunteerizing to have a RFID chip implanted.

“I can understand how it can be scary,” Bengson said. “But it is very simple and very secure.”

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

“In a lot of ways it was easier than a shot,” Bengson said. “I mean, I honestly don’t even hate 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 probably is a whole lot of technology in the chip itself,” Bengson 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 see the chip both as a key card and a credit card—allowing the building, logging into computers and even buying items in the breakroom.

“We’ve just really gotten 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 the 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 major markets and hospitals, Westby said the business is interested in the software that accompanies the chip. It’s shipped its own employees to further explore how the chip can be used.

“We need to Narrow this out because if you’re going to take it to market,” President Patrick McNallan said.

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

“Wendy just really honestly having fun with it right now,” he said.

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

“Let’s take the standard for what it is and follow that,” 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,” McNallan said.

Currently the chip is valued at $300, and has 958 bits of memory. Three Square Market hasn’t determined a price for market yet.

“This is 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 retrieved through the chip.

The idea even drew a protest near the location of the business last week. A member from the group called F-I 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.

McNallan, who has been chipped himself, said the chips are not GPS-enabled, so they are not used to track you. McNallan said the company did not solicit or sell personal information, or use it if only employees are doing their jobs.

“You’re going to be responsible, you’re going to be respectful,” McNallan said.

For those still doubtful, Westby said they chip isn’t for them.

“I’m looking at what it can do for people, we’re all looking at that,” Westby said. “We’re going to be nobody in everyday.”

Employee Melissa Tremeer 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 Alita Health about health concerns.

“I don’t want to miss out on this,” she said. “So I did it and I want my research to continue, I want to be 100 percent in it.”