

River Falls company offers to implant chips in its employees ... but won't track them



Tony Danna, vice president of international development at Three Square Market, poses in front of the company's logo at its headquarters, Tuesday, July 25, 2017 in River Falls, Wis. The software company is offering to microchip its employees, enabling them to open doors, log onto their computers and purchase break room snacks with a simple wave of the hand. (AP Photo/Jeff Baenen)

By [THE WASHINGTON POST](#) |

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Asking an employee to get a chip implanted may sound invasive and intrusive, but one company in River Falls, Wis., will be giving it a try.

Three Square Market — a developer of “[micro market](#)” vending facilities for workplaces — is offering all of its employees the option to get a microchip implanted between the thumb and forefinger. It’s quick, painless and the company will even pick up the \$300 fee. And don’t worry — there’s no GPS tracking capability ... yet.

The company is expecting 50 of its employees to voluntarily sign up for the implants.

The Radio Frequency ID chips would allow those employees who volunteer to participate in the program to open doors, pay for purchases, share business cards, store medical information, pay for stuff at other RFID terminals and log in to their computers, all with a wave of the hand.

“Eventually, this technology will become standardized allowing you to use this as your passport, public transit, all purchasing opportunities, etc.,” chief executive Todd Westby, a Lake Elmo resident, wrote in a blog post that claims the program is the first of its kind in the United States.

The program is also meant to be a real-life opportunity for Westby’s company to test and expand the technology for its own products. “We see this as another payment and identification option that not only can be used in our markets but our other self-checkout and self-service applications that we are now deploying which include convenience stores and fitness centers,” added another company executive.

A Swedish organization named Epicenter began doing the same thing earlier this year and its workers seem to love it.



Self-described “body hacker” Jowan Osterlund from Biohax Sweden holds a small microchip implant, similar to those implanted into workers at the Epicenter digital innovation business centre, during a party at the co-working space in central Stockholm, Tuesday March 14, 2017. (AP Photo/James Brooks)

“People ask me; ‘Are you chipped?’ and I say; ‘Yes, why not,’” one Epicenter employee said in [this AP report](#) from April. “And they all get excited about privacy issues and what that means and so forth. And for me it’s just a matter of I like to try new things and just see it as more of an enabler and what that would bring into the future.”

The technology in itself is not new. Such chips are used as virtual collar plates for pets. Companies use them to track deliveries. It’s just never been used to tag employees on a broad scale before. Epicenter and a handful of other companies are the first to make chip implants broadly available.

And as with most new technologies, it raises security and privacy issues. While biologically safe, the data generated by the chips can show how often an employee comes to work or what they buy. Unlike company swipe cards or smartphones, which can generate the same data, a person cannot easily separate themselves from the chip.

“Of course, putting things into your body is quite a big step to do and it was even for me at first,” Patrick Mesterton, co-founder and CEO of Epicenter, told the AP.

— By Dan Beyers