



WISCONSIN PUBLIC RADIO

THE JOY CARDIN SHOW



Tony Danna, vice president of international development at Three Square Market, works on his laptop in a company break room at its headquarters, Tuesday, July 25, 2017 in River Falls, Wisconsin. 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. *Jeff Baenen/AP Photo*

Convenience Is Benefit Of Microchip Implants At Wisconsin-Based Company

UW-Milwaukee Professor: Discussion About Tech Needs To Consider Unanticipated Uses

By Breann Schossow

Thursday, July 27, 2017, 4:10pm

Lunchtime is approaching, but you left your wallet at home. Oops.

For some, that may involve borrowing money from a colleague or skipping the meal altogether and spending a very hungry afternoon at your desk.

But if you're one of 50 employees at Wisconsin technology company Three Square Market, forgetting your wallet at home isn't a problem. After all, you've got funds available at your fingertips, thanks to a plan by the company to implant microchips into the hands of employees.

At this time, [50 of the 92 employees](#) at the company's Hudson headquarters have decided to get the chip, according to previous reporting by WPR.

The program is completely optional, said Tony Danna, vice president of international development for Three Square Market. The company is believed to be the first American business to do this.

"Everyone's signing consent forms that are doing it," he said of those participating. "The reason we're doing it is because we're a very innovative tech company, and this was an opportunity that stood in front of us that gave us a chance to kind of lead the way with something that was, it was coming within the tech industry."

The chip is injected using a syringe, takes "about two seconds" and is like a piercing, so it's going to sting when the chip goes in, Danna said. It can be removed and feels like a splinter being taken out.

The microchip uses radio frequency identification (RFID) and has to be within 6 inches of an RFID reader, which then sends a signal using the employee's unique identifier, Danna said. One way it can be used is for food. For example, the company's break room has RFID readers so employees with the chip implants will be able to access their account through the chip and make purchases.

Other uses include getting into the business or gaining access to certain areas of the building based on where the employee is allowed, Danna said. They'll also be able to store passwords that allow them to log into their computer.

Danna said one of the benefits is the convenience. On the other hand, the biggest misconception is this chip is a GPS tracker.

"It's not. It's a RFID reader, so you'd have to be within 6 inches for it to pick up any frequency, and you know that cellphone that you have in your hand, I think our employees understand that that cell phone is more trackable," Danna said.

Michael Zimmer, an associate professor in the school of information studies and the director of the Center for Information Policy Research at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, acknowledged the point about convenience is compelling. However, he pointed out that one of the concerns he has is that sometimes things move too fast without time being taken to think through unintended consequences or unanticipated uses.

"I just want to make sure that we're being careful and that we're thinking through some of the broader implications," Zimmer said. "If we start getting people used to the fact that we, we're now implanting identifiers in (the) body ... what does that mean in other contexts or how could this be used in other kinds of ways?"

"And we're always having this kind of struggle, this balance between convenience or utility and privacy, and so I'm glad we're having those conversations so we can start thinking through these things and making sure that we're not rushing into this new kind of technological environment."

Zimmer also said he thinks this technology could be used to surveil people. He acknowledged the type of RFID chip being used by Three Square Market needs to be close to an RFID reader, but said technologies could be developed that expand reach.

"I also don't know when it's being read," he added. "There could be surreptitious scanners built into my office furniture or built into different parts of the building or other companies or other places I interact with ... and that's where the key difference is here, is that I can't turn this off."

In [an interview with Phys.org](#), Zimmer said what Three Square Market is working toward can be achieved through less invasive means, such as with an app.

However, Danna noted a person could still forget their phone somewhere, losing access to the app.

"Ultimately, for a lot of the everyday tasks, we want you to be able to make those things happen with nothing in your pocket, so no more wallet is the ultimate goal, no more keys in your pocket, no more company cards, no more key fobs," Danna said. "... That cell phone has like what we're talking about, tracking ability and power, where this RFID chip never runs out of power because it's not a power based source."

Danna said the integrity and privacy of people were their main concerns with the technology and they want to make sure that stays a priority as they move forward with the project. The chips will be implanted next week.