

RFID As An eHealth Platform

Introduction

Radio Frequency IDentification (RFID) is set to revolutionise retailing. It could also form the basis of a number of new and innovative, healthcare related, services. The potential of automated shopping systems, where the customer scans products as they take them from the shelf, will increase markedly as RFID technology is deployed - consumers may even be able to access RFID data using a device attached to a smart phone or Phone Device Attachment (PDA).

While at present there is much talk of consumer resistance to RFID technology, there are a number of other issues retailers should address before deploying RFID systems. RFID technology could support services that, far from threatening their privacy, empower the consumer and enable third parties to influence a shopper's purchasing decisions. In this chapter we consider the threat posed to retailers by RFID based services and steps that should be taken before migrating automated shopping systems, first from a barcode scanning to a RFID platform, and then from a Wireless LAN (WLAN) to a mobile phone network.

Wireless technology is already being used to support automated shopping systems. Here the customer is issued with a handheld barcode scanner as they enter the store. The device is used to scan items as they are taken from the shelf. The handheld scanner is connected, via a WLAN, to a server hosting the store's product database and the customer's account file. The system offers the customer an alternative to waiting in a queue to unload their shopping trolley at the store's checkout desk. While the customer saves time and effort the store can reduce manning levels.

Automated shopping systems can provide healthcare related services: for example, alerting the customer if they have selected a product that is likely to cause an allergic reaction. In the majority of installations these functions are not implemented.

At A Glance

The current controversy surrounding the deployment of RFID in customer facing applications is centred on the threat the technology poses to the privacy of the consumer.

RFID technology could become disruptive to the retailer's business model if third parties use it to overlay an alternative database on the retailer's operation. This could happen if independent organisations use RFID technology to provide health related data on a wide range of food products.

Inside this report: -

Threats and opportunities arising from the use of customer facing RFID technology as a mobile ehealth platform.

Profiles and analysis of Symbol, Iscan and Blueleaf.

Instore ehealth from Walmart, Basha Foodstores Tesco and Boots Wellbeing.

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