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Analysis: 'Mr. RFID' Discusses RFID Security

By Eric Lundquist

Opinion: Kevin Ashton, vice president of marketing at RFID vendor ThingMagic, says "99 percent of security concerns in RFID can be addressed by existing technology."

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BOSTON—I caught up with Kevin Ashton just as he was getting back into Boston following a red-eye flight.

Kevin is currently the vice president of marketing at RFID vendor ThingMagic in Cambridge, Mass. Moreover, he was one of the co-founders of MIT's Auto-ID Center, and was an associate director at Proctor and Gamble.

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He's about as close to "Mr. RFID" as you are going to find.

I figured he would be good and grumpy after an all-night flight and ready to take on the two big current questions regarding RFID security: Is it really that easy to introduce an errant virus into an RFID network via a rogue chip, and can the power signals running between an RFID chip and the reader be intercepted for nefarious purposes? He was ready for both questions.

"The Dutch kids with the RFID paper? That was just a piece of rubbish, frankly. They treated data as it was code, which no one would do. It would be like driving a car with a blindfold and then concluding that all cars were unsafe," said Ashton.

Ashton, rising to the topic, blamed the wide play the researchers from Vrije University received on the confluence of the topics RFID and security that stirred the media interest.

"The most important aspect of RFID security is to implement security practices that already exist for other kinds of network technology. Ninety-nine percent of security concerns in RFID can be addressed by existing technology. They are solved problems," Ashton said.

No standard corporate security practices or information professionals would confuse data with code as the Vrije researchers did, Ashton contends.

So, toss out the Dutch paper, but what about the ability to intercept RFID signals as was implied by Adi Shamir? That type of intercept presents more of a challenge, said Ashton.

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