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## Don't Shoot the Messenger

In November, the U.K. government began to issue its first national electronic identity cards—in fact, the first ID cards of any kind issued since World War II. Each e-ID card contains a printed facial image and printed data, as well as biometric data—the person's fingerprints—loaded onto a secure chip on the card. Like electronic passports, e-ID cards use contactless RFID technology to provide the data transmission

capability that allows the biometric data to be checked quickly by a contactless reader.

Any ID card scheme was always going to raise concerns and objections, but I think the use of contactless RFID—perceived by many as a threat to personal privacy—didn't help acceptance of the government's plan. A combination of negative public opinion and the estimated cost of the e-ID project helped relegate the launch to a phased rollout rather than an immediate introduction for all U.K. citizens. In the first phase, some overseas students and those on marriage or civil partnership visas from outside the European Union are set to receive e-ID cards.



Some of the concern about e-ID cards stems from the misperception of biometrics and contactless RFID, and that does little to advance the potential benefits of either technology. Now that the two technologies are increasingly being deployed together, many people aren't distinguishing RFID from biometrics—both are considered people-tracking technologies.

E-passports are commonly referred to as RFID passports or biometric passports. But contactless RFID is simply the method for speeding and securing the communication between the e-document and the checkpoint, whereas biometrics is a technology specifically designed to automate the recognition and identification of an individual.

Biometrics adoption isn't just about government deployments and border security. The technology also is being used to secure the type of information that most people want to know is protected, such as bank and health records. It will increasingly be about helping individuals better secure their own personal electronic devices—such as computers and mobile phones. Interest and investment in an array of biometric technologies around the world will drive up spending from roughly \$3 billion in 2008 to \$7.3 billion by 2013.

As ever, it falls to the RFID industry to be clear about what RFID can and cannot be used for, as well as what it brings to applications such as e-passports. The industry also has to make sure that RFID and biometrics are not used synonymously. Otherwise, the use of RFID to carry biometric data will make the public more concerned about the use of RFID to track the items they buy. Strange as it may sound, the RFID industry needs to frame the debate based on the limitations of RFID as well as its strengths.

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