

THE ADVOCATE

24-hour watch



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December 1, 2008 at 6:22 pm by Laura Northrup



People should have learned by now that forwarded e-mails are rarely a reliable source of information about anything. I read about these two consumer-related forwards long before a well-meaning relative sent them to me. For once.

The first is a [list of retail chains set to close](#), which you should avoid if you plan to buy gift cards anytime soon. Simple enough. It would be good information to spread...if it were all correct. It isn't.

The second is a bit more complex. It describes how to determine where a product originated barcode numbers. Well-meaning and patriotic shoppers can choose only "American-made" products

StorefrontBacktalk

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WC: Not sure if this is possible, but could this woman go ahead now and pay the market price for current...

lisa: yeah this is a no brainer.....mortgage contract, oil contracts....you are locked in. Thats...

Ted: Yes , I have locked in on price with main-care oil . And on there plan if oil goes down ,you pay that...

Roger Livingston: I am finding out that pricing is all over the place.Big thing to consider is if they have...

GOSD: It's a contract, lady. You're entitled to nothing

The second is a bit more complex. It describes how to determine where a product originated barcode numbers. Well-meaning and patriotic shoppers can choose only “American-made” products by checking barcodes. [Or they could, if the system worked.](#) Not only is the story about the first three digits not exactly true, but the entire premise is flawed. As Evan Schuman points out in the linked article:

The first problem is defining what an American product is. Is that a product made in America, presumably at an American facility with local workers? Or is it a product made by an American company, meaning a company whose headquarters is in the United States?

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Serverbusters

November 29, 2008 at 3:07 pm by [Laura Northrup](#)

As more consumers prefer to spend Black Friday shopping at home in their pajamas, [some retailers' Web sites couldn't handle the load.](#)

At least [no one got hurt.](#)

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Creepy retail technology

October 24, 2008 at 8:08 am by [Laura Northrup](#)

More scary store technology from the retail site StorefrontBackTalk. A company in Washington state, [Intava](#), which designs touch-screen displays for use in stores and other venues, has developed technology that tracks the movement of customers' faces and what they pay attention to as they look at the display screen. The company thinks it could have [other retail applications](#), too. From the article:

With a large enough budget, [Intava CEO Tony Carroll] said, the ultimate test would be to capture customers as soon as they enter the store ... and use a series of digital cameras to track them throughout the store. “We could track what they are looking at, where they are lingering,” Carroll speculated. “We’d have a log that contains every important fact about that store visit.”

True enough. Indeed, if consumers are also using retailer-issued-and-owned credit cards, the surveillance could extend to what retailers they visited after they left the store and how much they bought there, assuming they use the same merchant-owned credit card.



Here's hoping that nowhere I shop ever has the budget for that.

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Big Brother is watching you sheetrock

October 17, 2008 at 5:35 pm by [Laura Northrup](#)

[Home Depot](#) is experimenting with new portable self-checkout kiosks. Generally, I like self-checkout, though maybe not when I was buying a half dozen tomato cages at Home Depot and had to wrestle them onto the barcode scanner. But the implementation of these kiosks seems incredibly creepy to me.

The store identifies 150 of its top customers, in this instance professional homebuilders, who might go into a Home Depot an average of twice a day.

Each of those hand-chosen customers is given the special orange-color loyalty card with that active RFID tag and 2-MByte memory for CRM data about that customer. There is one reader over the entrance that such customers typically use, Minor said, as well as readers in each aisle. When the location-based system detects the card and that customer's exact location, an SMS alert goes to associates. One associate grabs a kiosk and meets that customer in the aisle, greets the customer by name (hopefully he haven't borrowed his boss's loyalty card or that will be one blown bit of personalization), helps find items and then assists in the self-checkout process.

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Dan Higgins

Dan Higgins covers consumer affairs for the Times Union. [Read more.](#)

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