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BOOK INDUSTRY COMMUNICATION LTD

BIC RFID Privacy in Libraries

Privacy Policy
Draft Version 2
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THE BOOK INDUSTRY'S SUPPLY CHAIN ORGANISATION

RFID Privacy Policy

Name of Library Service:

Derbyshire Library Service

Number of libraries administered by this Service:

45 static libraries and 2 mobile libraries

Library Service Address:

Derbyshire County Council, County Hall, Matlock, Derbyshire, DE4 3AG

Introduction

This is the RFID Privacy Policy of the above library service. This policy explains:

1. what RFID is
2. the potential risk to privacy posed by RFID technology
3. what actions the library has taken to warn users, visitors and borrowers of these risks
4. what individuals can do to protect themselves from this risk.

As the technology develops it is likely that some measures may be possible to reduce the risk to privacy and this policy will explain these in the event that they are deployed in the library.

What is RFID?

RFID stands for Radio Frequency IDentification In libraries. This technology is used to place small RFID tags into library books. The information contained on the tags enables library users to self-issue a library book at a kiosk in the library. Library books with RFID tags can also be read several at a time by sorting machines and library staff can use hand held readers to do stocktaking and, for example, to locate miss-shelved books.

What is the risk to privacy?

Identifying the book

The RFID tag by itself poses no risk at all to the public but when applied to a library book it could be used under certain exceptional circumstances to inform a third party which book the user has borrowed from the library. In most cases this is completely harmless but in some circumstances a particular book might indicate an individual's lifestyle, political affiliation, sexual orientation etc.

If the individual kept the book out of sight, they might believe that this would protect their privacy but it is theoretically possible for a third party to 'read' the tag on the book and then identify the

book itself e.g. its title, author etc. The public should not panic about this as the chances of this happening are very small; for example, the device used to read the tag would need to be placed very close to the book and cross referenced to the title information held by the issuing library. So, although this is not very likely to occur, this policy has been written to inform library users of the risk.

Tracking the library book borrower
Even less likely, it is theoretically possible that a third party could track the movements of a citizen, for example a journey across a city, using the RFID tag on their library book. Admittedly, this is much more likely to happen through CCTV or perhaps possession of a smartphone but it is technically possible for an RFID tag on a library book to be read at very close range at one location and then at another and the result would be that the movement of a citizen could be tracked. Again, this is extremely unlikely but this library service takes privacy very seriously and this RFID policy document has been written to warn library users.

What steps have been taken to alert library users to the risk?
The library service takes the privacy of its library users very seriously and has written this privacy policy to inform and reassure library users.

- Signage has been displayed around the library wherever RFID is in use and at the main entrance(s).
- Library users have access to this RFID privacy policy so they can find out more about the issue.
- RFID self-service kiosks have all been labelled with an RFID warning logo:

- New library users and those renewing their library cards have been informed of the privacy risk posed by RFID and referred to this privacy policy.
- The library website has a link to enable visitors to download a copy of this privacy policy
- Staff have been trained to answer questions on this subject and members of the public can contact a designated privacy officer to discuss any concerns.

Can the risk be reduced?
Theoretically library tags could be locked or encrypted so that when out in public they could not be read. But the problem is that when library books are brought back to the library the RFID tag needs to be read to enable the book to be returned into the library. This technology has been deployed in libraries to enable self-service issuing and returning of library books. This has enabled libraries to improve the service they offer and reduce costs and it would be very expensive to re-tag all library books with encrypted tags. Some library books are issued in one library but returned to another and library stock is sometimes circulated to be used by other libraries. Different libraries use different systems from different vendors. At present the vendors have agreed a standard which enables tags to be read by nearly all the RFID systems. If tags are encrypted, then this interoperability between systems is significantly reduced and the benefit of using RFID tags is also reduced. So, the truth is that although in the future there may be some improvements in the technology which would help to reduce privacy risk, at the moment, there is little scope for implementing a technological solution to the privacy risk from RFID tags.

What should a member of the public do?
Members of the public should do the following:

- Be aware of the slight risk to privacy posed by RFID tags on library books.
- When borrowing a library book which you would not want to show to anyone for whatever reason, be aware that keeping it under cover e.g. in a bag or briefcase, may not be sufficient to ensure privacy as under the circumstances outlined above it could be possible for the book to be identified.
- Be alert to the behaviour of others e.g. someone trying to place a device e.g. a smartphone near your person or bag or briefcase in order to read the tag on your hidden library book.

Conclusion

Ultimately, public and many other libraries are publicly funded services and this library has explained the use of RFID tags and the potential risk to privacy. It is the individual's choice whether to use the library or not and which books to borrow.