The Internet of Things is now wearable

February 1 2018, by Dr Kate Raynes-Goldie

Thanks to a West Australian innovation, Australia is getting its first payment ring.

Last year, I was having dinner with a fellow from Bankwest. When it came time to pay, without saying a word, he tapped the card reader with his fist. Et voilà, dinner was paid for. It had the intended effect of amazing both me and the waitress.

Then he revealed the secret of his trick—it was the shiny black ring he was wearing. This was the prototype of Bankwest's recently unveiled Halo, which, thanks to Western Australian ingenuity, is Australia's first payment ring.

If it takes off, paying with a ring could be as common (and unimpressive to waitresses) as paying with your card.

And yep, I've already ordered mine.

Fist bump to pay

Halo contains the same NFC (near-field communication) chip found inside your bank card, so it works in the same way as tap and go payments—or as Bankwest describes, fist-bump payments.

Right now, the ring only works with Bankwest transaction accounts, so no wild ring-enabled credit card spending sprees are to be had just yet. It comes in black or white and is waterproof for up to 50 metres, in case

you wanted to take it swimming.

New ways to pay (and hydrate)

But Halo isn't the first Australian payment innovation. Thanks to Frank Green's Australian-designed and made SmartCup, you can also use your reusable cup to pay for your favourite hot beverage.

Like Halo, SmartCups have an NFC chip inside. Cafés can accept payments from the cups using CaféPay technology (also Australian-made).

And of course, because it's the future, SmartCups can also connect with Frank Green's Hydrate app to track how much water you are drinking (as well as a few other neat things too, such as how many plastic bottles you've saved from landfill by using a reusable cup).

The internet of things

Both the Halo and the SmartCup are examples of the trend towards the internet of things, where objects and devices are able to exchange data with each other. These smart devices use NFC chips or wifi, as is the case with assistant-style devices like Amazon Echo or Google Home.

These devices are increasingly including ourselves through wearables that track us. This is not entirely new, as we've all become accustomed to the idea of fitness tracking, with devices like Fitbit recording and sharing our every movement.

Implant training wheels?

But general-use wearables like payment rings could mark a shift towards

a widespread acceptance of actual augmentation—the transhumanist dream where we merge with technology and become cyborgs.

Consider Apple's AirPods, which Fast Company's Michael Brandt described as Apple's first implants. The idea is that these wearables are sort of implant training wheels. By wearing wireless earbuds all the time, says Michael, we get more comfortable with the idea of actual earbud implants.

Of course, some people are already comfortable—and excited—about implants. Last year, employees at an American tech firm gleefully got implanted with a chip that would allow them to do miraculous things like buy snacks from the office vending machine.

But is this something we really want? With news breaking that American soldiers are giving away sensitive information by jogging with Fitbits, is convenience more important than privacy?

Not to mention a 2010 literature review finding a strong connection between cancer and microchips in animals.

I'll stick with a ring that I can remove whenever I need to do my top-secret business.

This article first appeared on Particle, a science news website based at Scitech, Perth, Australia. Read the original article.

Provided by Particle