

# Can I Have My Wallet and Keys Back, Howard?

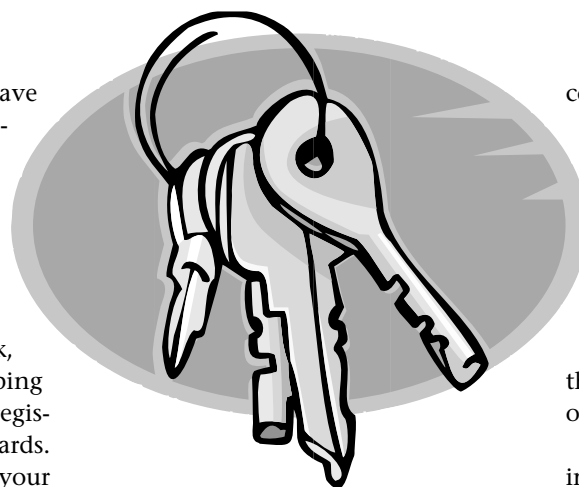
*Exposing personal data for the sake of convenience could make the PUP and telematon user a bit paranoid*

By **Glenn Everett**

A couple of times now I have seen Howard Strauss's dazzling presentation "Portals [or Teaching and Learning Technologies] in the Year 2015."<sup>1</sup> In Strauss's brave new world you will no longer need to carry keys to your house, car, office, or bicycle; cash; credit cards, phone cards, bank, insurance, airline, library, or shopping cards; nor driver's license, vehicle registration, university ID, or business cards. All these items—the contents of your wallet and key ring—will be replaced by a single Smart Cash Card, by your PUP (personal ubiquitous portal), and by various telematons—special-purpose computers that know where they are and who you are.<sup>2</sup>

Your PUP will take advantage of global positioning and biometrics to identify you to your car, home, office, and bank, thus eliminating the need for you to carry any form of identification other than your fingerprints, irises, blood type, and DNA. Your car, home, and office will welcome you and (no doubt) remind you to wipe your feet and replace the batteries in your smoke detector.

Strauss's future society is not at all inconceivable. He notes the presence already of Men's Wearhouse's fingerprint ID system, Diebold's iris scan ATMs, and Kroger's fingerprint payment system. Other supermarkets, drugstores, and hardware stores entice us into either signing up for their store cards or else paying more for their products. Turnpike and bridge authorities are closing down cash lanes in favor



of EZ Pass lanes; and vendors, credit card companies, and Web sites have been tracking our buying and viewing habits for some time.

It is only a step or two from Strauss's refrigamatons and grocery cartmatons to the dietmaton that will remove the beer and chocolate from your shopping cart, replace them with arugula and rice cakes, and refuse to open the fridge after you have consumed your caloric maximum for the day. Engaging the override would no doubt trigger a message to your doctormaton and your insurance agentmaton, resulting in a reprimand from your health care provider and a rate increase from your insurance company.

Strauss's argument that no one place will have all your PUP data is not very reassuring. The data will be there, not just ready be gathered, but already collected. It requires only a smidgen of paranoia to imagine this information in the hands of the government, insurance companies, ad agencies, and hackers. How easy would it be for someone

controlling your PUP to drain your bank accounts and run your credit to the maximum? How hard might it then be for you to prove that it was not you who had done these things? How easy might it be for someone unfriendly to you to generate bogus charges from the International Terrorist Fund? And how hard to convince the government of your innocence in our post-9/11 world?

Of course we know that much of this information is all too easily available already, but it does not follow that we should give up and embrace this new world where our personal data is transmitted to someone watching somewhere, with every move we make. Let's at least make it a little more difficult for others to completely strip our privacy from us in the name of convenience, theirs or ours.

Give me my wallet and keys back, Howard. I'll take my chances without the PUP's help. *e*

## Endnotes

1. At Syllabus Fall 2003 in Cambridge, Mass., and EDUCAUSE 2004 in Denver (<http://www.princeton.edu/~howard/powerpoint/futureeducause2004.ppt>).
2. From slide 12 of the presentation, "A Telematon is a personal, special-purpose, wireless, networked, intelligent device with local memory. It knows where it is (GPS) and knows who you are (Biometrics)."

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