Netflix and Good Technology like NFC for Building Access

While Apple passed on integrating near field communication (NFC) into the iPhone 5 [1], a couple of Silicon Valley neighbors have been testing the short-range wireless technology for building access to see how workers can one day use their smartphone as keys.

[2]

Netflix and Good Technology recently completed two pilot programs with security specialist HID Global, in what HID calls the first enterprise test of NFC for building access in Silicon Valley. Under the pilot programs, which began in early August, about a dozen employees at both companies were outfitted with Samsung Galaxy S III smartphones, which were equipped with a microSD card with an NFC chip. Using the HID's digital keys on the phone, users could open doors by tapping their phones on iClass SE readers from HID.

Netflix used NFC-equipped phones to replicate its proximity keyfobs, which its employees use for building access. The company was able to provision the phones over the air with the needed digital keys for access. Good Technology went a step further by testing out a two-factor authentication system, so users were required to enter in a pin before tapping their phone at a reader.

Netflix and Good Technology are still evaluating the technology and there's no immediate plans to use NFC for wide-spread building access. But the companies found a lot to like about using phones for physical entry. Here's some of the feedback:

- More than 80 percent of Netflix testers said the application for unlocking a door was "intuitive," and nearly 90 percent described it as easy to use.
- 87.5 percent of Netflix respondents said they would want to use a smartphone to open all locked doors at Netflix.
- More than 80 percent of Good Technology users said the smartphone was more convenient to use than their existing access card.
- More than 83 percent of users at Good felt that building security was improved by using a smartphone.

Using a smartphone for building access works in part because people rarely leave their phone behind, something that happens more frequently with access cards. And the phone also provides more security because users can secure the phone with a password and are trained in how to use the digital keys.

But don't expect NFC-equipped smartphones to be used for building entry right away. The tests also highlighted several challenges as well. Respondents said they needed an always-on solution, that can work even when the phone is dead or in use for calls or other actions. That's going to take some work on HID's part. And the use of NFC cannot drain the battery, respondents said. Relying on NFC-based smartphones for security will also require a lot more devices to be supported, including hopefully the iPhone, a favorite of many workers.

[3]

And companies like HID will need to be able to work more closely with the carriers and handset manufacturers, who control the NFC secure element. For example, with

the pilot tests, HID wasn't able to access the Galaxy S III's NFC chip because the carriers have not opened up access to the secure element on their phones.

Debra Spitler, vice president of mobile access solutions with HID Global told me that the tests, which follow a similar pilot last year at Arizona State University [4], demonstrate the appetite for using NFC in mobile phones for building access. She said NFC is on its way to becoming a useful tool for enterprise customers, even despite Apple's snub.

"In a perfect world, we would have suggested they use NFC but we don't think it's a showstopper in these early days," Spitler said. "It's just something we need to work through."

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