Since 9/11, Life _ and Surveillance _ Made Easier

The Associated Press

Americans' expectations of privacy have diminished remarkably since Sept. 10, 2001 — and only partly because of what happened the next day.

Laws were passed to take up the fight against shadowy terrorists by giving authorities access to information that previously was off limits. At the same time, technologies intended to make Americans' everyday lives easier have also made it easier for corporations — and the government — to track their movements and habits.

Here are seven ways in which our world has become a less private place:

- In the wake of the terror attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 gave the federal government unprecedented access to telephone and computer exchanges and expanded the government's right to wiretap. But it also dictated financial, library, travel, video rental, phone, medical, church, synagogue or mosque records held by third parties can be searched without your knowledge or consent, as long as the government says it is acting against terrorism.
- Facebook, founded in 2004, has prompted hundreds of millions of people to put details of their lives on public display. The company has come under fire for making people's personal photos available for use in advertisements, but media reports suggest the government has scoured Facebook's servers for audio, video, contacts, e-mails and other documents.
- "Smartphones" with built-in GPS capabilities could allow users to be electronically tracked. As of this year, more than half of all American adults use smartphones, according to the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project.
- Remote frequency identification, or RFID, chips. The Department of Agriculture used it to keep track of cattle being medicated, but RFID technology is now in everything from commuter passes to key cards. Tags

can be linked on the Internet — and read without the holder's knowledge or permission.

- Loyalty or "rewards" cards. Memberships in such programs — which offer savings, while tracking spending habits — have grown from 973 million in 2000 to nearly 2.7 billion last year in the U.S., according to the COLLOQUY Loyalty Census.
- Automated teller machines, or ATMs. Most often equipped with cameras, there are an estimated 414,000 ATMs in the U.S., a 28 percent increase since September 2001, according to Sam M. Ditzion, CEO of Tremont Capital Group, Inc.
- Automatic license plate recognition systems. Around since the 1970s, use of the technology has exploded since 9/11, allowing law enforcement to keep tabs on drivers' movements, says Jay Stanley, a senior policy analyst with the American Civil Liberties Union.

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Sources: Sam M. Ditzion, CEO of Tremont Capital Group, Inc.; Forza Marketing; RFID Journal.

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