



# Stores To Spy On Shoppers By Tracking Their Smartphones

TN Note: To add insult to injury, retail stores will start competing with intel organizations by tracking cellphones to collect shopper information. Most people don't realize that when WiFi is turned on, it becomes a trackable beacon to surveillance scanners and hackers. The remedy is simple: ALWAYS turn your smartphone's WiFi service OFF whenever you leave your trusted WiFi zone.

Scanners are to be placed outside stores from Pret a Manger to Aldi to track people through their smartphones' wifi signals.

One thousand of the sensors will be used to measure the numbers passing or entering, known as footfall.

The idea is that the information could help revive dying high streets threatened by the rise of internet shopping.

It could lead to changes in bus timetables to make shopping visits easier, or identify times of the day when free parking would help retailers. In theory, it could even be used to decide that some town centres are beyond saving.

But the idea that shoppers will be tracked through their phones' wifi signals is controversial. Many balk at the rise of the surveillance society through CCTV cameras, automatic number plate recognition and smartphones.

The campaigning group Big Brother Watch warned that many people do not realise they are being scanned in this way and that such surveillance systems are open to abuse.

The team running the project, however, insists all the information will be made anonymous, removing any possibility of the data being linked to a specific individual. And shoppers can opt out by choosing to turn off wifi signals on their phones.

The SmartStreetSensor Project is funded by the Government's Economic and Social Research Council.

The retailers so far signed up to take part include Pret a Manger, Aldi, Oxfam, Pizza Hut, Superdrug, Thorntons, Dixons Carphone, Patisserie Valerie, Jack Wills, Tortilla, The Entertainer, Eurochange, Itsu, and Ed's Easy Diner.

The 1,000 sensors that will be placed in 81 towns and cities around the country have been developed in a partnership between the Local Data Company (LDC), which tracks the health of high streets, and University College London.

Data from LDC shows that major chains closed 1,043 high street stores in 2015, while independent traders opened 593.

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