

Big brother is watching... and he's inside your fridge

As we stand on the
brink of a new
technological age,
DICK LUMSDEN
wonders where it will
all end

Exactly four years ago this week, the world watched in amazement as Apple introduced us to the iPad and opened the door to a whole new world.

That's right...it seems like tablet computers and apps and mobile internet have been around for ever...but it was only four years ago that we had our first taste.

Since then of course, we have become addicted to our smartphones and tablet computers, and the speed at which technology is moving is almost unimaginable.

But if you think the pace of change in the last four years has been huge...you have, quite literally, seen nothing yet.

If, like me, you are constantly amazed at what you can find on the internet in seconds, then be prepared to be swept aside by the Internet of Things.

What, you haven't heard of the Internet of Things yet? Well, this may be the first time you've heard the phrase...but it will be a household term by Christmas – guaranteed.

If the World Wide Web is the internet of information, data, pictures and online shopping, the Internet of Things is potentially everything you can see, feel and touch around you that can be connected electronically.

Confused? Ok try this. You have a black box fitted in your car and it records where you go, how fast you go, how many times you brake, how much fuel you use, how many Ginster's pasties you buy when filling up. The information it gathers can be shared with your insurance company, your local garage, fuel companies, tyre manufacturers, the police – pretty much anyone really.

Then everyone who has access to your data – and the data from the millions of other black boxes on cars all over the world – can start to make decisions on how much petrol to refine; how many tyres to manufacture, how many pasties to bake...you get the picture.

Now, imagine a similar black box, or a tiny microchip



■ Tiny microchips could be fitted to fridges, which can then tell you when you have run out of something. Pictured below, will we be able to check out the colour of Vladimir Putin's pyjamas?

Pictures: CONTRIBUTED

Things.

You may think I'm making all this up...but next week – next Wednesday actually – is International Internet of Things Day, when geeks, nerds, techies and boffins all over the world will be holding meetings to discuss the best places to stick these chips.

They will be in fridges, so you can be alerted when you need more cheese or are down to your last couple of eggs; they can be on dog collars so your pets don't get lost; you can even stick them on your children so you know where

which you can operate remotely from your smartphone, while sitting in your self-driving car on the way to your virtual office (they don't say how you actually get the smelly socks and pants into the machine from there of course).



Because the technology exists already, the only thing preventing us being swept away in a tsunami of microchips, is the ethical dilemma of who controls the information.

If I buy a new pair of shoes with microchips in the heels to alert me when they need to be repaired, is someone else using the data to work out where I have been – or where I am at any given time?

In shops, where the microchip will be the natural extension of the barcode, everything we buy will be tracked to us and monitored. Someone, somewhere, in a great big computer room several hundred feet underground, will know how many Jaffa Cakes I have eaten in a week...or worse, how many bottles of Pinot Grigio and Aspell's Cider have passed through Lumsden Towers.

Will they pass that data on to the NHS so I get a visit from the healthy living stormtroopers telling me to cut down? Where is it all going to end?

Because, you see, you can't just create something to capture data and keep it secret. Well, you can try, but if there are good geeks, and good nerds out there thinking this stuff up...then there are also bad geeks and hackers who are going to unzip their security codes and pass it all round the planet.

If the Internet of Things explodes in the same way as the world wide web has done in recent years, then in a very short space of time there will be no secrets left in the world.

We will all be able to go online and check out the colour of Vladimir Putin's pyjamas, see where he bought them and how much they cost – and even how often they go into his washing machine.

Still, if everything and everyone is being tracked and monitored 24/7 at least there shouldn't be any unsolved crimes any more.

No need for DNA proof if a whole series of microchip data from the top of the criminal's balaclava to the soles of his shoes can put him squarely on the scene.

Watch this space – you ain't seen nothing yet!

■ Dick Lumsden is Managing Director of Owl Marketing Solutions, a specialist in marketing and advertising to older consumers. If you have any views on this article, or are over 50 and would like to take part occasionally in some gentle consumer