

Around the Circuit

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■How Does That Work? -- An Internet Tip

The other day I was peeling one of those anti-shoplifting things off a recent purchase and I realized that I had not the foggiest clue how it worked. Here is a device that is made by the millions that uses some form of wireless technology, my specialty, on which I was completely uninformed.

So, how does one satisfy one's curiosity in the internet age? You could use [Howstuffworks](#), and you get an [answer](#), but readers of SSS Online are probably more technically inclined than the target audience of this site. So ... You find the patents!

OK, you probably know that the formerly free IBM patent site is now called [www.Delphion.com](#) and charges a hefty subscription fee, but you can still do key word searching for free. After you get patent numbers that you think might be interesting, go to the US Patent and Trademark Office <http://www.uspto.gov/patft/index.html> to get images or text of the actual patent for free.

First I needed good search keywords. I went to my favorite search engine, [Google](#), and searched on "anti-shoplifting tags" and found the site of [Sensormatic](#) who seems to be a manufacturer of these devices. I found out that a good key word phrase is "Electronic Article Surveillance". So I went to Delphion and started what amounted to a simple patent search. Using the references contained in the patents, I was able to go back to some of the seminal patents in the area and read up on how these tags work.

Reading patents is an art unto itself and is beyond the scope of this note, but if you stick to the Background, Description, and Preferred Embodiment sections you can get an extremely good education!