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At Work With | Anthony Scarola, TowneBank's information security officer

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Thé N. Pham | The Virginian-Pilot

Anthony Scarola, an employee at TowneBank, studies Google Glass's threats to privacy and personal information and tries to make his bank handle it. Photo provided at TowneBank in Stafford, Va. Wednesday.

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As told to Pilot writer Sarah Kleiner Varble

I have definitely one of the coolest jobs at TowneBank. I'm not the guy that handles all the money, but I do handle our members' confidential information and the protection of that confidential information, so that definitely means a lot to me.

A big part of my job is really educating myself on the new technologies that are available to our customers, to our employees and making myself aware of what the threats are surrounding those technologies. I don't just keep all that knowledge. The other part of my job is to allow our employees to know about the technology and to help them to understand what the potential threats are.

I signed up for the Google Glass Explorer program last September. I understood in general that it has a camera, it records videos and instantly can upload all that information to the cloud, if you will. So I wanted to get a hands-on understanding of what exactly that technology is and how it may impact our institution and again back to our members' data.

My son was super excited. He's 10. I guess he's a chip off the old block when it comes to technology. He wanted Google Glass for Christmas ... after I gave him a future glimpse of what might come – the day when he's wearing these virtual glasses and his virtual headset and playing video games kind of inside his mind, in 3-D and everything.

I reviewed them for about a month before I gave them back to the information technology department to review, and from there, I think it's gone to marketing and other areas of the bank.

I wore them for a couple conferences. I actually presented with them out in Phoenix. I used them in a cyber-security talk for the American Bankers Association conference. I was speaking to CEOs and presidents of other financial institutions, about 80 or so in the room. I asked them, "Have you considered this technology?" Of course, nobody raised their hand at the time.

I walked through the scenario of somebody down on their luck who has been propositioned with a pair of Google glasses from a criminal, potentially a cyber criminal. They get the glasses and that individual might be paid a small amount of money to walk into as many branches as possible, look at the security situation, look at the cameras, get a feel for the institution, all the while recording video and audio of what's going on around them. There's no light on the camera showing you are recording. It's very spy-like technology.

The first thing that's really important with any new technology is to help employees remove their fear of the technology. If you see someone wearing it into the branch, don't be afraid of it, but know what the capabilities are, and if you are uncomfortable with that, then definitely you would want to have them remove the glasses.

When I was walking around for that month with Google Glass on, I had a lot of different reactions, but one I thought was prevalent was people not wanting to make eye contact with me. After asking people afterwards, the first thing that came to their mind was that it was some type of medical device, and they didn't want to make me feel awkward by looking at me or staring at me.

I think from what I've seen in looking at Google forums and things like that, clearly I'm not the only one with this perception of the technology. There's a lot of pressure on Google to make some changes, and they're pushing back, from what it sounds like. They don't really want to make the changes because they want taking video and taking pictures to be seamless. They don't want it to be a distraction to the conversation. Often times they'll use the defense, "Well, you can take video with your camera or your smartphone," but the thing about that is, you don't have this (cellphone) attached

to your face all the time. There's going to be a lot of folks wearing them. Google designed it so you can wear them while you are driving. It's really no different than looking at your rear-view mirror.

Don't rely on somebody else to protect your data. ID theft is rampant among criminals today. They're definitely constantly looking for weaknesses in systems. It's not just individuals. What we're really seeing as an industry is entire enterprises that are criminal in nature that have hierarchies just like your business and my business.

Think about what can you get with your own information. You can call any business that you have an account with and verbally you can get information back about yourself from that business, generally without having any other pieces of paper. One of the things I try to educate our employees on is, try to imagine what a criminal would do with the information that you have around you. You want to be helpful to customers, but you've got to remember that you may be standing in front of a criminal at some point in time. So think like a criminal – with a smile.

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