

End Note

Out-of-Pocket Relief

By Michael Castelluccio, TECHNOLOGY EDITOR

It doesn't have a clinical name, so let's just call it *plastigrandizing*. The symptoms in males include wallets so stuffed there are mysterious episodes of sciatic pain. In females, there are carpal tunnel-like twinges caused by repeated efforts to jam a wallet, grown to the size of a baguette, into a small purse. The cause in both cases is an ever-increasing stack of plastic cards.

One obvious solution would be to reduce the number of cards you have to carry to negotiate your day. The ideal would be one card for everything—credit, debit, one pass, library, grocery-store courtesy card, video store, smart-card ID—everything. And that's what the Chameleon Network company of Concord, Mass., is working on.

The Chameleon Card is aptly named, but the real genius is in the Vault (the holder) where you store the card. The Chameleon is able to replace magnetic-stripe, bar-code, and smart-card type cards because it's reprogrammable. If you want to pay with your Visa at the store, you take out the vault, press the thumbprint identifier, touch the Visa logo on the face of the card, and the card is ejected out the top with the necessary Visa information and a readout on its face announcing that it's now a Visa. The clerk swipes it, and, in 10 to 15 minutes, the card goes back to its anonymous status in its holder.

Now this may sound like an ideal gift for an identity thief, this one card that's everything. And it would be except for that scooped-out section at the bottom of the vault that will only accept your thumb's signature ridges and whorls. Add to that the card's amnesia attack after 10 or so minutes, and you don't have to worry even if you lose the card, vault, and wallet. It's biometrically locked and doesn't even know its own name after a few minutes.

You can get progress reports on when Chameleon Network will be making the card available at www.chameleonnetwork.com. Until then, we'll just have to put up with the unclasped purses and commuters who lean leeward of their wallet-side.

