



Why the NRA Opposes Smart Guns

By Katie Trumbly
October 15, 2014

The iPhone was introduced Jan. 29, 2007--a piece of technology never seen before in a world where technology was changing every single day. When the phone was finally available, people waited for days outside their local wireless stores before its release. Today, the iPhone has developed personalized technology only dreamt about; fingerprint recognition and touch sensors are the new normal. The breakthrough has been a catapult for securing personal belongings from unwanted hands. This innovation could also be available for securing firearms. The only problem is the NRA (National Rifle Association) and gun extremists don't want people to have it. Prompting the question: If an iGun were available, would you buy it?

"We need the iPhone of guns," Ron Conway, an early Facebook and Google investor, said in a February 17, 2014 *Washington Post* article. He was referring to a form of technology that would enhance gun safety by personalizing the gun to fit the owner, and most importantly, only shoot for the intended owner. What Conway failed to realize was that the technology already existed and there are multiple prototypes. It just boils down to reliability and acceptance.

Armatix, a German company based in California, has developed a handgun that unlocks with radio frequencies. The model is called "iPI" and contains an embedded radio transmitter that enables the gun to fire. The gun owner wears a watch transmitting radio signals to the weapon. When the owner is ready to fire the gun, he/she will enter a chosen password into the watch and then be able to fire the weapon from up to 10 inches away from the watch. The technology has been in progress since 1999 and is widely available in other countries.

Paul M. Barrett, in a April 28, 2014 Bloomberg *Businessweek* article, questions the gun's ability to protect a housewife from an intrusion, "Would a smart gun work in a pinch? ... Would the owner correctly enter her PIN number when she heard the burglar forcing open the kitchen door?" The interest died out because of an overwhelming fear that people would not be able to mentally take the steps to fire the gun in a crisis.

When Smart Gun technology first caught the attention of the public in a 1999 *Wall Street Journal* article, the smart gun was in beta testing by Colt Manufacturing Co. and the demonstration left journalists doubting its abilities. The Colt Z-40 worked similarly to the iPI, the radio signals were sent by a wristband instead of a watch, and the microchip in the handle was supposed to react to the radio signals being sent by the wristband.

The demonstration started with Barrett, and his writing partner Vanessa O'Connell, standing in a shooting gallery with Sliwa (current Colt chief executive) waiting for the gun to fire with Sliwa wearing the wristband. "...Mr. Sliwa pulls the trigger. Nothing. He tries again. It doesn't budge. 'For awhile it worked fine' he says." Both journalists walked away knowing the gun would never make it to production. In the year 2014, the gun has progressed little, but many inventors are trying to take a swing at the personalized gun market.

The newest technology advance for Smart Guns comes in the form of RFID and radio signal technology. Advancements of RFID technology has gone beyond the watch or wristband into a small ring, and address the concerns of misused or stolen weapons. RFID devices can be found in any anti-theft tag attached to store merchandise. This embedded technology in the gun would make a stolen gun unusable and give peace of mind to parents when they send their children to school. This technology, according to a February 17, 2014 article, "would render guns inoperable if they approached electronic markers--for instance, near a school." The safety of that gun couldn't have gotten anymore SciFi until Colorado's Kai Kloepfer and the New Jersey Institute of Technology both had the same idea: put iPhone fingerprint technology into a handgun.

Being able to buy, sell, purchase or gain access to something with only your fingerprint is a new concept that is welcomed by many. It provides security and eliminates time wasted entering numbers into a dimly lit screen. Taking that concept and applying it to a handgun is something America may be ready for, and a teenager from Colorado has the answer.

Kai Kloepfer, 17, is a high school student from Colorado. Because of a dream he had, he won \$50,000 dollars from Smart Tech Challenges Foundation to produce a Smart Gun that uses touch sensors to identify the grip of the gun owner. The gun would recognize the grip of the owner and trigger the activation of the gun, allowing it to shoot.

According to a Sept. 11, 2014 interview with Huffington Post, Kloepfer's intention with the gun was simple: "After the mass shooting in the movie theater in Aurora in 2012, I started thinking about the role technology could play in preventing accidents and deaths related to firearms. All you have to do is pick the firearm up and the way you naturally rest your hand on the firearm unlocks it." The advanced technology used on this particular model would eliminate the worry of entering a password or wearing a watch at the right distance from the gun. It would just allow the owner to use the gun to defend her/himself.

The New Jersey Institute of Technology reported earlier that they were also exploring this type of gun individualization, with much different versions to be explored. The NJIT is working on a handgun that also uses fingerprint identification. The gun also recognizes the owner's handling pattern, as well. In a Feb. 17, 2014 interview the NJIT mentioned a Utah company working on an "Intelligun" that also uses fingerprint identification, and also, a California company working on an app for their gun that would alert the owner that the gun had moved. The companies and research labs, including NJIT, believe there is a market for making unsecured guns similar to owning a BlackBerry.

However, the state institute leading the groundbreaking research is also home to the state preventing the gun from being sold.

New Jersey Law S1223 had a different purpose. It was supposed to prevent accidental death/injuries by guns and provide advancements in gun manufacturing. The law showed favoritism to Smart Guns and personalized technology by only allowing the sale of Smart Guns in the state of New Jersey three years after the first Smart Gun went on U.S. shelves online and in stores. The law, supported by New Jersey Senator Loretta Weinberg, and passed in 2002 was called the Childproof Handgun Law. As a revolt the NRA and gun extremists proceeded to throw the biggest tantrum against gun manufacturing progress since the assault rifle ban.

The law would only allow ownership of Smart Guns in the state of New Jersey, but the law would only be triggered if the sale of a Smart Gun happened anywhere in the United States. The NRA took that as a challenge to make sure the gun never went on sale anywhere in the U.S. Earlier this year, two stores, one located in California and one in Maryland, decided to put the Armatix iP1 on their shelves. "It actually doesn't matter if the gun has been sold. If there's just one available for sale anywhere in the United States, then that triggers the handgun bill," said David Kopel, a Cato Institute policy analyst, in a June 24, 2014 NPR interview. The media jumped on the news, and the NRA started to call in their troops.

Andy Raymond, one of the owners of Engage Armament in Maryland, wanted to sell the gun to open the doors for a brand new market of buyers. In the same June 24, 2014 interview with NPR he said, based on a video posted on the company's Facebook page, "I thought that if you got people who never wanted [a gun] or didn't want one in their house because of their kids... getting it."

However, when the news broke that he would be shelving the Armatix iP1, he got a lot of attention from extremists that did more than vocalize their anger at his decision. Raymond received threats, including multiple death threats, from people who thought he was aiding in the threat to take away their Second Amendment rights. Raymond, in a July 16, 2014 Huffington Post interview about the incident told the reporter, "Even by local people, people I thought were my friends [threatened him]."

In a April 28, 2013 Bloomberg *Businessweek* interview, the NRA made its position on the matter known: "Failed attempts to develop and market 'smart guns' have been going on for years. NRA does not oppose new technological developments in firearms; however, we are opposed to government mandates that require the use of expensive, unreliable features, such as grips that would read your fingerprints before the gun will fire." Senator Weinberg doesn't believe them. In the same June 24, 2014 NPR interview she told the reporter that she would repeal the law only if the NRA would publicly agree not to stand in the way of the technology. If a small percentage of gun extremists and the NRA don't care for a Smart Gun, what does the public or professionals who use handguns have to say about the matter?

"I know, had it been readily available for me back in the day, I would've been using it," said William Marshall, a retired police officer and general in the National Guard, in the NPR interview. He is not the only police officer wishing the technology were readily available. San Francisco Chief of Police Greg Suhr agreed, especially for his undercover police officers that don't have the same holster safety features as uniformed officers do.

The main hesitation with gun users seems to be the reliability and the fear of failure. When it boils down to technology, everyone is scared it will fail. Failure in a time of need can lead to a gun extremist who always believes they are under attack to fear the gun would not recognize their fingerprints or the battery would die when an intruder is in their home. These arguments are the same arguments used time and time again when technology or scientific advancements have been made. Fear aside, is there even an open market for it? According to the NJIT, there is.

A Feb. 17, 2014 *Washington Post* article on Smart Guns used a 1997 survey showing 71 percent of Americans in favor of a Smart Gun and 59 percent of the 71 percent being gun owners. The National Shooting Sports Foundation and other Second Amendment activists found their surveys to report only 14 percent of American gun owners favoring Smart Guns.

In the same interview, Robert McNamara, the co-founder of TriggerSmart, had this to say about the 14 percent, "I thought that was actually a huge number. There is no doubt that a lot of people would buy these guns if they were available."

Professionals and a percentage of Americans don't oppose the smart gun. Moms Demand Action founder Shannon Watts, in a Feb. 21, 2014 *USA Today* piece, had this to say about Smart Guns, "This technology could help reduce or eliminate 'accidental' shootings or suicides by children and teens, and render a gun useless if it is stolen from its owner." Watts then agreed with every other proponent of this form of safety by saying, "...the gun lobby has stood in the way of progress in personalization technology claiming that it infringes on the rights of gun owners."

This is even more evident in an April 3, 2013 *Washington Post* article that found that 90 percent of Americans wanted expanded background checks. A year and a half later, background checks have not been expanded and tragedies involving guns keep on happening at the cost of lives being lost.

Are the fears of new innovative technology and the reliability the reason the NRA and gun-extremists are at a standstill with the rest of Americans? In a May 30, 2014 NRA-ILA video interview with NRA Chief Lobbyist Chris Cox said the NRA is, "...interested in winning." It seems the NRA's desire to win will always be more important than the tragic cost of lost lives.