

# New Report on RFID Patents

A report issued by High Impact, an intellectual property research firm, analyzes more than 4,000 patents issued between 1970 and the end of 2003.

By Mark Robert

July 6, 2004—The first RFID patent-infringement lawsuit was filed recently by Intermec (see [Intermec Sues Matrics](#), and RFID vendors have been battling over intellectual property issues related to the UHF Gen 2 Electronic Product Code specification. So the publication of a new report, "RFID 2003," is particularly timely. It analyzes the substance of 4,279 RFID-related patents issued in the United States before Dec. 31, 2003. "Between 1970 and 2003, 1,256 U.S. patents containing the specific term 'RFID' were issued," says Bruce Nappi, founder of [High Impact IP](#), the Weston, Mass., IP research company that produced the report. "Of these, 62 percent were issued in just the last four years. Also, surprisingly, 22 percent of these U.S. patents went to foreign firms, mostly in Germany and Japan."

The complete 750-page report, which costs \$2,400, consists of three volumes that can be purchased separately for \$995 each. The first volume summarizes the technical and business issues related to the RFID patents. It describes RFID technology, tells what technologies and applications are being protected by patents and quantifies the purchase of patents from inventors. (Last year, 30 percent of the U.S. RFID patents were acquired by manufacturers from patent holders in states other than where the manufacturers were based, and 23 percent were acquired by companies from overseas.)

Geographical maps show patent activity state by state and country by country. Technical maps show a diagram of a typical RFID circuit and indicate the number of patents that are related to each section of the circuit.

Volume 2 contains all the raw data that is summarized in volume 1. It includes information on 4,279 patents broken down to show each one's patent number, issue date, title, inventors, assignees and patent attorneys. Separate tables are included for inventors, assignees and attorneys organized by geographical location. Volume 3 provides plain English translations of the legalese in patents that made technical improvements to RFID in 2003. Many of RFID-related patents filed in 2003 focused on applications of RFID, such as tracking the freshness of food or ensuring personnel security. These were not covered in Volume 3.

"Almost every RFID vendor will find important information here," says Nappi. "Engineers can determine the latest technical advances and find out who's making them. They can determine what applications and technologies have already been covered, how deeply, and which areas are wide open. Manufacturing can determine what new processes are being employed and where to go to get them."

Nappi says vendors can also use the report to deduce what new products or product features the competition might be planning to introduce based on their rivals' patent filings. Corporate legal departments can also find out what the competition has protected in order to anticipate legal opposition going forward. If a company has a lot of RFID-related intellectual property, it can find out who might be interested in buying it.

The report could also be of value to a systems integrator trying to determine which companies have the leading-edge technology it needs for a particular RFID project. Venture capitalists could also use the report to evaluate the patent position of a startup.

"Having a complete list of companies, inventors and attorneys at the forefront of the industry will save legal teams hours of hunting through industry guides and search listings," says Nappi. " A few hours reading the summaries could prevent a company from pursuing an RFID into a competitive dead end."

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