

# Radio Beacon RFID Pilot Kits

Warehouse management software developer Radio Beacon releases two new RFID pilot kits aimed at Wal-Mart's tier 3 suppliers.

By Jonathan Collins

July 22, 2004—Warehouse management software developer Radio Beacon has launched two new RFID pilot kits for its WMS customers.

Radio Beacon's Wal-Mart RFID Compliance Pilot Kit lets companies manage the application of RFID labels to cases and pallets being shipped. The other kit, the OnPortal Trial Pack, provides additional RFID data-gathering technology to enable tagged cases and pallets to be automatically scanned as they leave a manufacturing plant or a warehouse of a third-party logistics provider.

According to Radio Beacon, the overwhelming majority of its WMS customers use Microsoft's Great Plains and Solomon business applications. Radio Beacon WMS is sold with an interface to a specific Microsoft application (such as Microsoft Great Plains, Microsoft Solomon, Microsoft Axapta or Microsoft Navision). The new kits include middleware from Radio Beacon partner System Concepts that connects the Radio Beacon WMS with the RFID readers, and will enable those companies to investigate the potential of RFID in advance of any mandates they might face to place RFID tags on cases and pallets of products they ship to retailers.

"Our customer are not among the top 100 Wal-Mart suppliers, but as tier 3 players they know that the mandate will be extended to them, and they want to be in a position to show allegiance and commitment to their Wal-Mart relationship by starting to examine compliance now," says Tom Berend, director of technology services at Radio Beacon, which is based in Toronto.

The Wal-Mart RFID Compliance Pilot Kit includes an Intermec RFID Printer and 500 Intermec EPC Smart Labels and management and System Concepts middleware that collects from RFID tags and delivers it to the WMS application.

The kit now ships with Intermec's Intellitag PM4i printer and RFID label encoder (the labels have to be manually applied to cases and pallets) and 500 of Intermec's 4x6-inch 915 MHz 108-bit smart labels, Radio Beacon maintains that it may eventually deliver the package with a choice of RFID labels and printers after EPCglobal's Generation 2 standard becomes finalized later this year. "We tell our customers that there is no standard defined yet, but we believe that Intermec has the offering closest to what we believe that standard will be," Berend says.

The company expects the majority of its RFID customers will not purchase either of its kits until after that standard is in place later this year, but for those that buy prior to the standard's finalization, the company says it will provide its customers with the necessary firmware upgrade free of charge.

While the Compliance kit includes just one printer and a limited number of labels, Radio Beacon says the software will support the expansion of any pilot to any number of printers. The Compliance kit is priced at

CDN\$16,995 (US\$12,992) and available immediately through Radio Beacon's distribution partners, who will also be responsible for deploying the offering.

While the Compliance kit will enable companies to start placing RFID tags on shipments in keeping with the retailer's mandate, the OnPortal Trial Pack will give companies tagging their shipments a way to check those shipments using RFID. The kit comprises an RFID portal that can be placed at the truck-loading door to read RFID tagged shipments as they pass through in the process of loading for transportation.

The OnPortal kit includes a complete RFID portal including a frame that contains four RFID antennas, stack lights and a photo-electric eye, and is large enough to drive a loaded forklift through. The four highly directional RFID antennas are staggered in a pattern that provides maximum illumination inside the reflective materials of the portal. The stack lights—located outside the portal in a position where they can be seen from either side of the portal—consist of red and green indicators that show if a shipment's tags have been read correctly and if the pallet is carrying the correct products for delivery. The photoelectric eye detects when someone is in the portal so that the to avoid having the need to keep the antennas rather than keeping the antennas powered up continually. As with the Compliance kit, the OnPortal kit includes System Concepts middleware and Intermec RFID reader and printer-encoder, although more hardware options may be added at a later date. The OnPortal Trial Pack, which will be supplied and deployed by Radio Beacon's distribution partners, is priced at CDN\$24,995 (US\$19,116).

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