

# The Role of Independent Testing

The RFID Alliance Lab, supported by *RFID Journal*, will be an important resource in the development of the RFID market.

By Mark Roberti

Sept. 27, 2004—For the past 18 months or so, many companies that are among the early adopters of Electronic Product Code technology, or that are facing mandates to put EPC tags on products, have been repeating the same tests over and over. These companies get tags and readers based on the EPC Class 1 and Class 0 specifications, put them on products made of metal or containing liquids, and test and test and test. There are two problems with this approach: It's wasteful for companies to all be doing the same basic tests, and the tests aren't always performed professionally.

More than a year ago, I recognized the need for an independent testing lab. Not a lab that puts RFID tags on a company's products and tests them for compliance with mandates from that company's customers. Not a lab that tests conformance with a standard or certifies interoperability. But a lab that provides baseline data about the performance of RFID tags and readers. A lab that can produce independent reports that implementers can rely on to quickly determine which tags and readers are among the best for a specific application.

Last week, *RFID Journal* announced the creation of the RFID Alliance Lab, an independent, not-for-profit testing facility that will provide objective benchmarking reports on RFID equipment. The lab will be based at and run by the University of Kansas's Information and Telecommunication Technology Center (ITTC), and it will be supported by Rush Tracking Systems, an RFID systems integrator based in Lenexa, Kan., near Kansas City. Rush specializes in identifying and implementing RFID systems and has real-world experience that ensure the test results will reflect the conditions users will experience in their own facilities.

*RFID Journal* provided funding for the lab because it enables us to provide baseline data on equipment to our paid subscribers. *RFID Journal* will publish the first data on all commercially available EPC tags in early November (subscribers will get discounts on the full reports). This will be an apples-to-apples comparison of EPC tags under both ideal and real-world conditions. A major company in the Kansas City area has agreed to allow tests to be conducted in one of its warehouses, which is fully operational.

What's unique about the RFID Alliance Lab is that it has deep expertise and is totally objective. The ITTC has been testing RF equipment, including Bluetooth devices, for several years. The staff brings a scientific approach to testing that makes the results credible and useful. And since the ITTC is part of academia, the lab cannot be accused of skewing the test results for financial gain. These two issues were critically important to *RFID Journal*, because we know our readers must have faith in the quality and objectivity of the information we provide.

In supporting the RFID Alliance Lab and distributing its reports, *RFID Journal* runs the risk of alienating some advertisers whose hardware doesn't perform well in the tests. But I have confidence that the test results will be fair and accurate, and that in the end, vendors will also benefit from having an objective source of information. Years ago, a magazine I worked for published a report in which Gateway came out dead last in providing tech support. A year later, Gateway executives thanked us for the report because the company used

it as motivation to improve service, which it did.

I'm pleased that *RFID Journal* is able to provide valuable benchmarking data to our readers, and I'm proud to that our company is playing a role in providing the services the industry needs to grow and companies need to get the much-heralded benefits of RFID technology. If you would like to be notified when the first report is released, send your name and contact information to [Reports@RFIDAllianceLab.org](mailto:Reports@RFIDAllianceLab.org).

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