

A Salute to Our Readers

This year was an important one for those who want to deploy RFID technologies, and our hats are off to those who are leading the way.

By Mark Roberti

Dec. 13, 2004—*RFID Journal* will not be publishing its weekly newsletter on Dec. 23 and Dec. 30 because of the holidays. This is also my last opinion column of 2004, so I'd like to take a look back at the year and offer a salute to our readers who endured a lot and in many cases achieved a lot.

This was a milestone year for RFID. End users have had to cope with a great deal of conflicting news and erroneous information and some comments from analysts that were, frankly, hard to fathom. But I get the sense that many of our readers now understand that the RFID is a technology that will enable them, in time, to achieve new efficiencies. The mandates from the U.S. Department of Defense and major retailers around the world are a challenge, but more and more readers are using that challenge as motivation to transform their own operations.

We've been saying all along that using RFID in open supply chains is hard. This year, many of our readers learned firsthand just how difficult it is to read a tag on a case of canned fruit, soft drinks or shampoo traveling down a conveyor at 540 feet per minute.

Yet, a lot of progress has been made. Mike O'Shea, director of corporate auto-ID/RFID strategies and technology at Kimberly-Clark, said at our executive conference in March that his company was struggling to find a way to tag cases of baby wipes. "They are like a wet brick," he said, noting that its hard to read tags on anything with high water content . But later in the year Mike told me that his team had found a way to tag baby wipes in a way that the tags could be read successfully. Other readers have shared similar stories.

Sorting through all the business issues surrounding RFID is also a challenge. I'm sympathetic to those who are trying to deploy the technology in a way that delivers real value. It's not easy being the first to deploy a new technology, especially one that combines physics, IT and business process change. It's even harder when you have to deploy the technology on someone else's time timetable.

One analyst firm predicted recently that 50 percent of all RFID projects would end in failure. Perhaps. But for many of the readers with whom I communicate, failure is not an option.

I realize there are big obstacles still to be overcome. Most end users are focused on how to comply with RFID requirements—a.k.a. mandates—and reap internal benefits. They haven't even begun to deal with how to share data with business partners to transform the supply chain. It will take years, but I have no doubt you will figure out how to build a more efficient global supply chain.

And let's not forget that hospitals are moving toward using RFID not just to become more efficient and more profitable, but also safer. Pharmaceutical companies are taking steps to protect consumers from counterfeit drugs. And many ports are moving quickly to use RFID, electronic seals and other technologies to secure containers.

And that's why I salute all of our readers—both end users and vendors—who are in the trenches, figuring out the solutions, making the much-hyped "RFID revolution" happen, one small battle at a time. You have another difficult year ahead. No doubt there will be a slew of people telling you why you will fail. I'm sure there will be setbacks, but I have no doubt that quietly and efficiently, you will continue to prove that no problem is too daunting, no obstacle too high. You will find a way to succeed. All of us here at *RFID Journal* wish you the best in 2005. We are proud just to have the opportunity to chronicle your efforts.

Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article, click on the link below.

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