

RFID News From the NRF Trade Show

Here is a roundup of announcements from RFID vendors at last week's National Retail Federation trade show and exhibition.

By Mark Roberti

Jan. 24, 2005—Several vendors of radio frequency identification products and services made news announcements at last week's National Retail Federation trade show and exhibition in New York City. Here is a roundup of the most significant ones.

Sun Offers Slap-and-Ship Option . . .

Sun Microsystems, the Santa Clara, Calif.-based hardware, software and service provider, introduced the Sun Java System RFID Tag and Ship Solution. The Tag and Ship Solution is an entry-level RFID package aimed at companies trying to comply with tagging requirements from their customers. It includes a Sun W2100z workstation and monitor, the Sun Java System RFID Software, SmartLine SL5000e MP RFID label printer from Printronic, a fixed RFID reader and a bar code scanner from Symbol Technologies, and 500 RFID labels. The software enables companies to assign Electronic Product Codes and write them to RFID labels, store the EPCs in a database and generate advance shipping notices. Sun didn't disclose pricing, but Vijay Sarathy, director of RFID product marketing and strategy for Sun, said that the Tag and Ship Solution would be significantly less expensive than similar packages on the market.

. . . And an RFID Reference Architecture

Sun Microsystems also introduced an RFID Reference Architecture, a design for the network and RFID infrastructure that companies will need in order to implement an RFID system and that can be expanded over time to meet a company's needs. Vijay Sarathy, director of RFID product marketing and strategy for Sun, said the reference architecture was created using knowledge Sun gained while working with early adopters. Sun also introduced the first of several planned industry solutions architectures—packages that it will create with partners to allow companies in specific industries to deploy RFID quickly and cost-effectively. The first solution is for retail and was created with SeeBeyond, an enterprise-application integration company based in Monrovia, Calif. Details of the offering will be made available later this quarter.

Symbol Promises New Form Factors for RFID Reader

Alan Melling, senior director of EPC solutions at Symbol Technologies, said that the integration of Matrics into Symbol's operation is 95 percent complete and that the company is now focusing on developing new form factors for RFID readers that would make installation of the technology faster and cheaper. Symbol showed off its handheld reader, which currently reads only EPC Class 1 tags, and the DC400, a unit that features a reader and antennas in a steel enclosure. Melling said the company planned to create an EPC Class 0 handheld unit and other form factors. "Companies are going to be installing a lot of infrastructure in a short period of time," he said. "Our goal is to build on our leadership position and offer prepackaged form factors that dramatically reduce installation times and therefore are cheaper, more effective solutions for end users."

Intermec to Make RFID Marketing Push

Intermec Technologies, an Everett, Wash.-based provider of RFID systems, said it plans to boost its

marketing efforts in the second half of the year when second-generation Electronic Product Code technology is available in commercial quantities. Scott Medford, VP of RFID for Intermec, said his sales force will begin to sell directly to end users, rather than selling exclusively through resellers and systems integrator partners. He said Intermec had increased its R&D budget and expects to have commercial quantities of Gen 2 chips late in the second quarter. "We're going to make a bigger push," he said. "We're going to use the existing sales force and our channel partners and integrators to push it more. Q3 is when it all breaks loose."

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