

Alien Targets Smaller DOD Suppliers

Combining training services with hardware and software, Alien's RFID Ready Kit is designed for small companies looking to comply with the U.S. military's RFID mandates.

By Claire Swedberg

Feb. 14, 2005—Radio frequency identification hardware supplier [Alien Technology](#) has released an RFID package aimed at suppliers to the U.S. Department of Defense. The package, which combines training services with hardware and software, is enough to get small and midsize suppliers started on complying with the DOD's RFID mandates, according to the company.

The Alien RFID Ready Kit includes two days of training and follow-up professional services, as well as one Alien EPC RFID reader, an RFID antenna and 100 passive RFID tags. The educational aspect sets Alien's RFID Ready Kit apart from similar products offered by other companies, says Susan Pearson, director of government solutions at Alien, which is based in Morgan Hill, Calif.

"A lot of people just don't know what RFID is," she says. Of the 43,000 companies that supply goods to the DOD, many are small companies with little understanding of the DOD RFID mandate or how to become compliant. That lack of education, she explains, is what leads some small companies to make the mistake of buying unnecessary technology, such as RFID printers. Small companies that ship only 50 to 100 boxes per month may not need to invest in printers but instead can install one RFID reader in the warehouse, program their RFID tags themselves and manually apply the tags to the boxes, as opposed to running rolls of 4- by 6-inch labels with RFID inlays through a RFID encoder-printer that automatically programs the label's embedded inlay and prints text onto the label's surface.

Not only is the encoder-printer an added expense, but the 4- by 6-inch labels can also prove costly, Pearson says. In addition, until 2007—when the DOD requires that all shipment containers include an RFID tag—not every shipment to the DOD needs RFID tagging, Pearson says. However, a printer cannot make that kind of determination, she says, and will produce 4- by 6-inch RFID labels for all packages, whether the labels are needed or not.

The Alien kit includes two days of classes at Alien's "RFID Academy," located in Morgan Hill. The classes help customers learn how to make RFID work for their company, and how they can keep their RFID system costs as low as possible. Alien expects to open a second academy this summer in Dayton, Ohio.

After a customer completes the two days of training, Alien offers one day of professional services in which an Alien technician comes to the customer's facility to assist in using the RFID kit.

While the kit is tailored to DOD suppliers, Linda Prosser, vice president of marketing, says Alien may provide a similar kit eventually to Wal-Mart vendors.

The RFID Ready Kit has two options: the EPC Class 1 High-Performance Package (ALR-9780), which includes an RFID reader that can read EPC Class 1 tags, and EPC Class 0/1 Flexibility Package (ALR-9774),

with a multiprotocol RFID reader that works with both Class 0 and Class 1 tags.

The kit also includes 100 user-programmable 96-bit EPC Class 1 RFID tags, an RFID antenna and accessories such as serial cable, power supply, power cord and carrying case. Alien also provides a Ready Kit Guide, which includes information published by the DOD on its RFID mandates.

The Alien RFID Ready Kit does not contain middleware or help for integrating the RFID system with a company's warehouse management software or other back-office business applications. If customers need middleware or integration assistance, Alien refers them to its partners, which include [R4 Global Solutions](#) and [Wireless Facilities](#) and other middleware and systems integration providers focused on the government market.

The ALR-9780 RFID Ready package costs \$6,990; the ALR-9774 RFID Ready package is priced at \$7,990.

Copyright ©2005 RFID Journal, Inc. All Rights Reserved