

RTI, DeVry Team Up to Teach RFID

RFID Technical Institute and DeVry University have partnered to offer business and technical courses in radio frequency identification.

By Mary Catherine O'Connor

June 23, 2005—RFID Technical Institute (RTI) has partnered with DeVry University to offer business and technical courses in radio frequency identification, beginning in July. RTI, a Cambridge, Mass., startup launched in January, develops RFID educational services. Ann Grackin, RTI's cofounder, CEO and president, says her firm's partnership with DeVry, based in Oakbrook Terrace, Ill., provides RTI with a sophisticated academic environment, complete with physics labs and large facilities supporting a wireless infrastructure where RTI instructors can develop RFID system simulations and test equipment.

Grackin says this is a far superior approach than "setting something up at a Holiday Inn" to teach RFID courses, as many competitive executive education courses do. The partnership will also allow RTI to expand its RFID courses throughout DeVry's network of 75 locations in 21 states and Canada. RTI fostered its partnership with DeVry through the university's Center for Corporate Education, which offers resources from the DeVry system to create educational programs for its clients—in this case, RTI.

The RTI courses are designed for people seeking to deploy RFID applications at their workplace, but Grackin expects they will also attract students currently enrolled in various technical courses within the DeVry system. Likewise, some students enrolled in RTI's RFID courses might find DeVry's general technology courses, in topics such as electrical engineering, complementary to their RFID studies. DeVry offers business, technology and management education courses with a strong focus on job placement and advancement.

Grackin says by offering its initial courses in Arlington, Va., close to many government agency headquarters, and in North Brunswick, N.J., located near many major pharmaceutical corporations, RTI is meeting the demand for education among end users needing to deploy RFID for the United States Department of Defense and in the pharmaceutical supply chain.

In order to provide objective, vendor-neutral education, RTI is structuring a curriculum that its instructors must follow to ensure that students receive consistent information, and that instructors do not turn classes into stump speeches for individual RFID hardware and software vendors.

Grackin says she "cherry-picked" the instructors from both industry and academia, but is still in negotiations and not yet able to name them.

Grackin, a former consultant in the supply chain and logistics industries, cofounded RTI with a handful of other management- and technology-focused executives with backgrounds in wireless technology and IT. "When it came to RFID, we'd been bemoaning the mediocre education situation, so we decided this year to do something about," she says regarding RTI's formation.

A weeklong, introductory course is being offered at DeVry's Arlington, Va., campus during the weeks of July

11 and July 25, at its North Brunswick, N.J., campus during the week of July 18 and at its campuses in the Midwest and West sometime in the fall. The introductory course covers the fundamentals of RFID, including how tags and readers communicate, how the technology can be applied in various industries and how electronic product codes work.

RTI and DeVry will also roll out advanced one- and two-day courses this fall, offered in two tracks. One track is for people interested in managing the deployment of RFID systems. The first course on this track will provide the basics of RFID project management for a small RFID operation. The second will instruct students on how to manage larger, integrated RFID deployments, and how to seek an ROI from RFID. The other track is for those interested in the more hands-on deployment of RFID systems. The first course on this track will provide the basics on equipment installation and testing, while the second will help students learn how to deploy complex or large networks of RFID readers and tags.

Once students move through these introductory and advanced sessions, they will be ready for seminars with industry-specific focus, such as the retail supply chain, health care and aerospace. RTI currently offers these seminars on its own, but it will also start offering them through DeVry later this year.

According to Grackin, RTI and DeVry have enrolled 11 students in the July 11 course thus far, representing Fortune 200 companies, government agencies and consultants. "There is great demand for this kind of education from consultants," she says.

The courses have a 20-person capacity. The weeklong (30-hour) introductory courses cost \$4,950. The one- and two-day secondary courses are not yet scheduled but will cost around \$1,000 each.

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