

Unisys Manages RFID for Thomasville

Under a two-year contract, Unisys is providing round-the-clock help desk and on-site support services for the furniture maker's RFID system.

By Jonathan Collins

June 27, 2005—[Unisys](#) has begun providing [Thomasville Furniture Industries](#) with information technology (IT) services for the company's RFID network. The services consist of round-the-clock help desk and on-site field support for hardware and software related to the RFID infrastructure deployed at Thomasville's Appomattox, Va., distribution center.

Unisys maintains that its two-year contract to support Thomasville's RFID network is a first in the RFID market and a sign that the technology is moving into the mainstream of company IT operations.

"RFID is moving from pilot to technology infrastructure, and it is being treated as any other core infrastructure, such as servers, routers and desktops," says Peter Regen, vice president of [Unisys' global visible commerce division](#), which the firm launched last October (see [Unisys Starts Up RFID Unit](#)).

Thomasville turned to RFID systems integrator [ODIN Technologies](#), in Reston, Va., to design and deploy its RFID network, which currently comprises four [Alien Technology](#) readers (interrogators), two [Zebra Technologies](#) smart label printer-encoders and RFID middleware from [Shipcom Wireless](#).

Thomasville began tagging its self-assembly furniture shipped to [Target](#) this month to meet the retailer's June 1 mandate. It will also start tagging some shipments to [Wal-Mart](#) later this year. The RFID tags will enable Thomasville to confirm the delivery of the products to the retailers. Because of the size of its products, the company is tagging at the item level, with an RFID tag inside each product box.

Unisys will be the sole point of contact for Thomasville whenever issues arise with its RFID infrastructure. The firm expects to provide support for any number of potential RFID problems, ranging from power outages and reader damage to a drop in read rates and interrogator antenna tuning. However, in the event of severe infrastructure failures and reinstallations, Odin will work with Unisys to get the system working again.

Unisys says it believes managed RFID support services will become increasingly common as RFID deployments at companies become important aspects of company business. "This is a new offering in the RFID marketplace, but it serves a long-term need and shows the maturity of the RFID market. Pilot RFID deployments don't need long-term support," says Regen.

For more than 10 years, Unisys has provided similar support to the [U.S. Department of Defense's](#) own RFID deployment for tracking containers in the military supply lines. However, the company says, the Thomasville contract is its first in the commercial sector.

While Thomasville will alert Unisys to any problems with its RFID infrastructure via phone or e-mail, Unisys says it expects that its managed RFID service offering will eventually include monitoring the performance of

the furniture maker's system.

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