

Real Assets: RFID Experts

Companies need to develop in-house experts with a good grounding in the fundamentals of RFID, which is why training programs and certification are becoming so important.

By Mark Roberti

Aug. 22, 2005—Two articles I'm currently writing have brought home the value of developing staff who understand radio frequency identification systems. First, I'm working on a case study that shows how [Kimberly-Clark](#) uses its in-house "dirty" lab to develop solutions that will be rolled out to its facilities. I had the opportunity to visit the lab and interview a dozen of the people working in K-C's auto-ID and sensing technologies group—from Cheryl Perkins, the CTO to whom the group reports, to three college student interns. What impressed me was the talent K-C has assembled and the investment it's making in educating this team.

Kimberly-Clark's lab is an impressive facility, housed in a manufacturing complex that reflects the real-world conditions in which the company will be deploying RFID. The lab has a 270-foot loop conveyor, dock door portals, a stretch wrapper and some 125 pieces of RFID-related hardware. The team gets to test RFID products and learn how they work in the real world, day in and day out. K-C is building its own intellectual property around RFID, and the collective knowledge of this group of individuals is a real asset for the company. You can read the story in the September/October issue of *RFID Journal* magazine.

I'm also working on an article about best practices companies should follow when developing and launching a field trial. I interviewed the co-chairs of [EPCglobal](#)'s Pilot and Implementation Work Group: Nancy Tai, manager of innovation R&D at [Georgia-Pacific Corp.](#), and Steve Rehling, director of IT and head of RFID systems at [Procter & Gamble \(P&G\)](#). Tai was discussing the need for a cross-functional team to run the RFID projects, saying it should have links to other groups within the company, including corporate strategy, finance, procurement, legal, public relations and human resources.

Human resources?

"Yes," she said. "You don't want to train people and then lose them, so you have to have a retention strategy."

Leading early adopters understand how valuable people with hands-on RFID experience are, and it makes sense to have both a training and retention strategy. How critical the demand for people with RFID skills will become depends on how rapidly adoption occurs. I don't think it's going to happen overnight, but even at the current pace, the industry might not be able to train enough people to install and maintain systems properly.

One of *RFID Journal*'s goals is to support the development of the industry as a whole (obviously, we'll do better as a company if the industry is healthy). To that end, we're backing [CompTIA](#)'s attempt to create a standardized certification test, which will foster a healthy training industry and help end users identify people with basic skills. CompTIA will soon be looking for people to take the initial draft certification test, and I hope many of our readers will volunteer. This will help CompTIA revise and improve the test. (Bert Moore of [AIM Global](#) has been doing an excellent job leading CompTIA's Foundation Committee, of which *RFID*

Journal is a member.)

RFID Journal has also partnered with [OTA Training](#) to offer [RFID Journal University](#), an in-depth, hands-on, vendor-neutral training course. There are two things that make this course special. First, it's held in the leading test labs around the United States, so attendees can get hands-on experience in a real-world environment. They can put tags on products (you are welcome to bring your own), and see how they read when moving through a real dock door portal, or when traveling on a conveyor moving at 600 feet per minute. Second, the courses are taught by people who have deployed UHF RFID systems in production environments. I sat in on one class and listened as attendees asked a wide variety of questions; it was clear they valued hearing answers from people who had been in the trenches.

Early adopters understand that RFID can provide a short- to mid-term competitive advantage—and perhaps even a long-term advantage—if they can devise ways of using the technology to develop a closer relationship with their customers and add value to their products. And the only way they can seize that advantage is by investing in people and developing strategies to retain talent. That's just smart business.

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

Copyright ©2005 RFID Journal, Inc. All Rights Reserved