

# IBM Announces Partnerships, Products

Big Blue is launching a range of RFID services, many in conjunction with OATSystems or MARC Global and TrueDemand Software.

By Mary Catherine O'Connor

Sept. 14, 2005—One year after initiating a \$250 million, five-year investment to develop RFID products, laboratories and customer projects, **IBM** has announced partnerships with RFID middleware provider OATSystems, supply chain execution systems vendor MARC Global and TrueDemand Software, a Silicon Valley software startup developing a demand forecasting tool that uses electronic product code (EPC) data. The purpose of the partnerships is to bring combined products and services to end users of RFID. In addition, IBM has announced two new RFID-related products and is opening a new RFID test center in Raleigh, N.C.

IBM and OATSystems have been developing a partnership over many months, during which they've shared information and training so that services teams from both companies can help customers with each other's software products. IBM wanted to work with OATSystems because it considers the firm a leader in the RFID software market, and because the companies' mutual clients wanted them to work together, according to Ann Breidenbach, director of product line management and business strategy for IBM's Sensors and Actuators division, which is responsible for developing RFID offerings. The company partnered with OATSystems to provide RFID device management services to their clients before IBM's December launch of its RFID WebSphere Premises Server (see IBM Launches RFID Middleware), a suite of software products for managing RFID readers and other devices, as well as the processing of RFID data. Many capabilities of the WebSphere platform overlap those of OATSystems' RFID data and device management platform, Foundation Suite. For this partnered services and product offering, the two companies have integrated their systems, with OATSystems software running on IBM's WebSphere platform.

By combining RFID device and data management services from IBM and OATSystems with hardware from a network of partnering companies around the world, Breidenbach explains, end users will be able to deploy end-to-end RFID systems. Because WebSphere has a service-oriented architecture based on the Java 2 language for network applications, users will be able to integrate RFID data with such third-party data management systems as warehouse management or billing applications.

Breidenbach says IBM watched many of its accounts "kicking the tires with RFID over the last year or so, and doing trials and considering where in their business they want to deploy [it] first." But this is changing, she states. "Now they see that deployment is real, and they need a scalable, manageable infrastructure and the ability to deploy in many places. They're seeing that this technology has more potential than they thought, and that there are multiple business areas. But they need the tooling and a good library of use cases and business processes that they can draw from." IBM's partnership with OATSystems will provide this, she says.

IBM and OATSystems are targeting their combined services to consumer goods manufacturers and retailers. Mark Osofsky, OATSystems' vice president of marketing and product management, says both companies will focus on providing bundled solutions so that retailers can pilot an RFID system and, if it proves their business case, roll it out across many sites. For CPG companies, they'll target the fundamental challenge of reducing

deployment costs by using best practices derived from the vendors' experiences with past deployments.

According to IBM, MARC Global and TrueDemand Software are building solutions on the IBM RFID Premises Server. However, the technology giant has not yet provided details on those offerings. IBM will reportedly soon make announcements regarding customer deployments resulting from these partnerships.

The firm has also announced two new sensor-based product and service offerings: RFID for Work in Process and RFID Express. Work in Process, which grew out of an internal IBM project to automate its semiconductor production process at the company's semiconductor fabrication facility in East Fishkill, N.Y., uses RFID interrogators, integrated with production tools within a plant, to accelerate materials management. IBM says the system can help companies gain real-time visibility of the assembly line process, improve productivity and reduce errors and production delays. Philips Semiconductors has just deployed its RFID Work in Process solution, IBM adds, running on IBM WebSphere RFID middleware at Philips fabrication facilities in Asia.

RFID Express was developed to help companies comply with retailer and Department of Defense requirements to ship RFID-tagged merchandise while also leveraging RFID data to maintain optimal inventory levels. In conjunction with its business partners, IBM will help businesses establish RFID smart label printing and tagging systems on site. Equipment located in the customer's facility will be monitored by an IBM operations center that provides help desk and error-resolution support, as well as maintenance dispatching. Tag data will be processed by IBM, then transferred to remotely managed RFID network environments at the customer's site.

Both solutions include IBM's WebSphere RFID middleware, in addition to tags, readers and other RFID hardware from IBM business partners.

Moreover, IBM will open the Wireless Center of Excellence on its campus in Raleigh, N.C., next month. The center will offer RFID testing for mandate compliance or other applications, in a 5,000-square-foot facility that will simulate an RFID-enabled distribution center. This center will consist of a software test lab, a high-speed loop conveyor system, a pallet-wrapping station, forklifts and dock doors. RFID tags, interrogators and other hardware will be provided through IBM's partner network.

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