

British Telecom's RFID unit launched its first off-the-shelf product, offering customers an active tag system to help track and manage reusable business assets.

By Jonathan Collins

Feb. 2, 2006—[BT Auto-ID Services](#), the RFID unit of [British Telecom](#), has launched its first offering, a managed service involving active RFID tags called AssetIntelligence. This service targets companies looking to track and manage their reusable business assets better without investing in or developing their own RFID systems.

AssetIntelligence bundles together RFID equipment and tags, system design and deployment and the software and server hardware needed to collect and distribute the data. It uses active RFID tags and readers (interrogators) from BT partner [WaveTrend](#) and a BT-hosted version of [RedPrairie](#)'s mobile Resource Management (MRM) asset management application.



*Geoff Barraclough, BT
Auto-ID Services*

Fees will vary, BT reports, depending on the scale of each customer's requirements. "AssetIntelligence is priced per asset, per month, on three- to five-year contracts," says Geoff Barraclough, marketing director at BT Auto-ID Services.

BT Auto-ID Services deploys RFID interrogators at the customer's site, then connects those readers to its hosted management application through a PC, also deployed on-site. This PC runs BT software that collects tag data from the readers and uploads it to BT's servers over the Internet.

The company rolled out a trial version of AssetIntelligence last summer at one of the BT's 150 U.K. technical engineering centers, where its engineers can collect supplies needed for customer installation and repairs. Cable drums were tagged to help track their locations, while a separate application recorded how much cable remained on the drum. Such a deployment ensured that engineers would be able to get the cable they needed when coming to the center for equipment.

"The benefit [from this deployment] was in improving customer service by making sure equipment was where it was needed," says Barraclough. BT indicates it might extend the tagging of cable drums to the other centers, but has made no decision yet to do so, or to set a potential timescale for deployment.

BT has also piloted its new managed service with [Laing O'Rourke's Select Plant Hire business](#), which leases power tools, cranes, diggers and other construction equipment. Select is using active RFID to track 10,000 items it leases. The tagged equipment is automatically interrogated on exit from Select's premises to confirm it is no longer on site. It is then read again upon entry to the delivery site, triggering the start of billing.

According to BT, this has reduced Laing O'Rourke's administrative costs, as well as the number of billing queries it gets from its customers, by more than 50 percent. In this particular application, however, Laing O'Rourke is using its own existing inventory management software rather than the managed RedPrairie-based application from BT. "They are using about two-thirds of the AssetIntelligence offering," says Barraclough.

BT's focus on active tagging for its initial managed service, the company says, stems from the demand for the technology from its prospective customers. "We can work with any RFID technology, including passive RFID," Barraclough explains, "but we have found there are more applications and much more appetite for active RFID than we had expected."

Tracking reusable assets such as containers, drums, pallets and trolleys can help businesses reduce the time and resources spent searching for assets for which the location or status is unknown. It can also reduce the need for extra assets to cover for misplaced or stolen assets.