

# Alien Opens Dayton RFID Lab

The RFID systems provider hopes support from five Ohio universities and a vendor-neutral approach will make the RFID Solutions Center a valuable resource for the industry.

By Mark Roberti

Feb 8, 2006—This week, [Alien Technology](#), a provider of UHF RFID systems, opened the [RFID Solutions Center](#) in Dayton, Ohio. The facility is supported by numerous technology partners, government agencies and five area universities. Alien has even brought in equipment from competitors, such as [Symbol Technologies](#). The company hopes this vendor-neutral approach will turn the center into a valuable resource for end users, researchers and RFID vendors.

“Someone once described their supply chain as ‘our profits in motion,’ and RFID is a tool for tracking these profits in motion,” said Stav Prodromou, CEO of Alien Technology, addressing the more than 50 dignitaries including Jon Husted (R), the speaker of the [Ohio House of Representatives](#) who attended the opening ceremony. “We feel that this center will be a vital resource for end users around the world, as well as researchers and technology providers.”

The 23,000-square-foot center has a simulated warehouse, distribution center and store environments, as well as classrooms to be used by universities and for Alien’s educational program, the [Alien RFID Academy](#). The center has a high-speed conveyor, a pallet stretch-wrapper, a forklift and other equipment outfitted with RFID readers for testing.

Many RFID testing centers and labs have opened within the past year. Two aspects, however, make Alien’s RFID Solutions Center unusual. First, it is supported by five academic institutions: [Ohio State University](#), [Ohio University Center for Automatic Identification](#), [Wilberforce University](#), [Wright State University](#) and the [University of Cincinnati](#). These schools will work with the center to develop RFID curricula, enhance RFID studies via student internships at the Solutions Center and other methods, and facilitate faculty consulting engagements at the center and other joint projects.

The other unique element is Alien’s decision to work with competing equipment vendors, such as Symbol, and complementary-technology providers, such as [RF Code](#), which sells active RFID systems. Prodromou said it made sense to bring in competitors’ equipment because end users know the competitors are out there and will compare products one way or another. When they come to the center, end users can quickly evaluate products side by side, including RFID interrogators, label applicators and handheld RFID readers.

There are three ways end users can benefit from the facility. They can attend the Alien RFID Academy, an Alien-created training course that includes training on the equipment in the lab. They can rent time with the equipment on an hourly or daily basis, working with Alien engineers or alone to test the ability of different interrogators to read specific tags, for instance, while their products travel around the conveyor line. They can also sign up for Alien’s consulting services, which can include access to the facility as part of the consulting contract.

End users attending the center's opening, who are also Alien customers, praised the facility. "I'm thrilled to see a center like this that is technology-agnostic," says Jamshed Dubash, director of technology/EPC for Procter & Gamble (P&G). "I took a tour and was surprised to see readers from other companies. Centers like this are essential to the adoption of RFID."

Lorna Estep is deputy director for supply at the Directorate of Logistics and Sustainment, Headquarters Air Force Materiel Command at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. According to her one benefit of the center is that end users can test systems before deploying them. "Prior to the center opening, we did a lot of testing in our operational environment, and you'd rather not do that," she says. "You'd rather learn the lessons in a center like this, where it doesn't impact your operations."

The center, run by Alien's Damon Bramble, has been operational since October 2005. "We'll work with university and commercial partners to develop next-generation solutions," says Bramble. "This will bring value to the industry."

Prodromou declined to say how much Alien, the state of Ohio and federal entities have each invested, though he did point out that Alien's partners have donated nearly \$1 million worth of equipment.

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