

IBM Markets RFID Suite for Tracking Drugs

The company created its package of software and services to help firms across the pharma supply chain collect and share tag data.

By Beth Bacheldor

Aug. 8, 2006—[IBM](#) unveiled today a suite of RFID software and services designed to help pharmaceutical companies track and trace drugs as they move throughout the supply chain.

IBM created its new suite, IBM RFID System for Pharmaceutical Track and Trace, to provide companies a way to collect all the information necessary to create a drug pedigree. Either paper-based or electronic, a pedigree documents a drug product's chain of custody as it moves through the distribution system by detailing the genealogy (history) of who manufactured the drug and who handled it as it traversed the supply chain. In addition, IBM's new suite is designed to help firms more effectively analyze data created when RFID interrogators (readers) read tags attached to cases of drugs moving through the supply chain, and to share that data with trading partners.

“There are two important aspects,” explains John Del Pizzo, global solutions executive for [IBM's Sensor and Actuator Solutions division](#). “You've got to capture the data—the tag reads and information and context about each read—within a system. Then, you've got to be able to handle all that information: You've got to be able to manage all that data, and share it with trading partners, and run reports on it.”

The IBM system includes WebSphere RFID Premises Server, which collects all the read data from RFID interrogators embedded with IBM's WebSphere RFID Device Infrastructure (WRDI) middleware. Such interrogators are available from a number of third-party RFID vendors, including [Alien Technology](#), [Intermec](#) and [Symbol Technologies](#). The WebSphere RFID Premises Server resides at a company's site and can be integrated with that firm's manufacturing execution system (MES), warehouse management system (WMS) or other production system. This allows such business software applications to correlate a tag's unique ID numbers with a drug's batch and lot numbers, expiration date and other production data necessary to create a pedigree.

Additionally, the IBM RFID system includes a beta version of IBM's Electronic Product Code Information Services-compliant data repository. The vendor recently completed testing to determine the functionality and interoperability of the proposed EPCglobal standard for this repository (see [Unilever Launches Trial Using EPCIS Protocol](#)). The EPCIS, currently a working draft standard, serves as the communication mechanism between applications and data repositories so companies can effectively exchange and query data from within their own RFID processes and with partners.

The WebSphere RFID Premises Server will pass RFID data to IBM's EPCIS-compliant repository. This software will be used to share the data with back-end systems, including enterprise-resource planning systems and analytical applications, as well as customers, suppliers and other business partners. [Unilever](#) is partnering with IBM to test its EPCIS-compliant repository so it can more effectively share information with its trading partners (see [Unilever Expects Big Gains From Its RFID Data-Sharing Trial](#)).

In addition to software, IBM's Global Services division provides a number consulting, systems integration and outsourcing services. Its health-care and sciences group, in particular, can provide services tailored to meet pharmaceutical companies' needs, as well as help them get the IBM RFID system up and running. "With our expertise, we can help deliver a lot more value, and provide companies with an end-to-end solution," Del Pizzo says.

The IBM pharmaceutical track and trace RFID system is available now.

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