

Academic Convocation Tackles Health Care and Life Sciences Issues

The FDA, Wal-Mart, McKesson and some high-powered researchers will address key issues affecting retailers, vendors and everyone in the HLS industry.

By Mark Roberti

March 12, 2007—Perhaps in no other industry is the case for radio frequency identification technology as compelling as in health care and life sciences (HLS). The value of the assets and products that can be tracked, the problems with counterfeiting and the need to ensure the safety of the public are all reasons why RFID can deliver real value to that industry in the short term.

And yet, the HLS industry faces some special hurdles to adoption. For instance, there are concerns about whether RFID systems will affect implanted medical devices, as well as the efficacy of drugs and the operation of other RF equipment in hospitals. So I think it's very timely that the 5th Annual RFID Academic Convocation, being held on April 30 at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort in conjunction with RFID Journal LIVE! 2007, will focus on these issues—as well as on other critical issues, including how to use RFID to generate electronic pedigrees and improve supply-chain efficiencies.

Ron Bone, senior vice president of distribution planning at McKesson Corp., will update attendees on e-pedigree regulations, and Mike Rose, vice president of RFID/EPC global value chain at Johnson & Johnson (J&J), will discuss the research requirements for RFID in the HLS industry. The goal is to inform both academic researchers and vendors of the issues J&J and others are facing, and the kinds of research that need to be done to solve those problems. Leslie Hand, director of global RFID strategy at Ahold USA, will reveal some of the lessons Ahold has learned from RFID pilots in its HLS supply chain.

Bill Hardgrave, director of the RFID Research Center at the University of Arkansas, will lead a session that examines the business requirements RFID must meet in the health-care supply chain. During that session, Carolyn Walton, vice president of information systems at Wal-Mart, will discuss some of the operational issues around using RFID to track goods in the health-care supply chain. Wal-Mart is one of the leading pharmacies in the United States.

These issues are critical to pharmacies, hospitals, distributors and drugmakers, but they are also critical to retailers that sell drugs and over-the-counter medication. In addition, supermarkets that sell aspirin, cold medicines and the like will want to use the same technology as hospitals and pharmacies; otherwise the manufacturer needs to have two separate inventories with two different RFID tags, which would be prohibitively expensive.

Speakers will also address issues surrounding the use of the EPCglobal Network in HLS and other industries. John Williams, director of the Auto-ID Labs at MIT, will look at ways to build an EPCglobal Network simulator to support HLS e-pedigree scenarios. Another core issue of interest to everyone looking to use the EPCglobal Network to share data—whether in HLS or other industries—is how to build a robust

infrastructure capable of handling the data load. Steve Georgevitch, Boeing's total asset visibility manager for advanced logistics support systems, will address "stress analysis issues and methodology for EPC network constructs."

In addition, the group will look at some of the physical challenges of using RFID in HLS. Two presenters from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will reveal, for the first time, the results of tests the FDA has performed to determine the effects of RFID interrogators on implanted cardiac pacemakers and defibrillators.

Marlin Mickle, director of the RF Prototyping and Measurements Laboratory at the University of Pittsburg, will explain the physics of RFID in relation to pharmaceutical products and reveal findings from real-world pharmaceutical distribution pilots. J.P. Emond, co-director of the Center for Food Distribution and Retailing at the University of Florida, Gainesville, will discuss HF versus UHF in pharmaceutical supply chains. And Robb Clarke, a professor in the School of Packaging at Michigan State University, will report on item-level tagging experiences with pharmaceutical products.

RELATED_ARTICLES Moreover, there will be other presentations of interest to both those inside and outside the HLS industry (see the complete agenda), because many of the issues are common to all supply chains and IT infrastructures.

The goal is to foster collaboration between RFID labs doing critical research, end user companies facing implementation issues and vendors seeking to supply products that meet end users needs. Judging by the quality of the end users and academics participating, it should be a fruitful event.

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