

What's Really Happening With RFID Adoption?

Wal-Mart, the U.S. Department of Defense, Boeing and Hewlett-Packard discuss their rollout plans and the state of adoption in their respective industries at EPC Connection 2007.

By Mark Roberti

Sept. 10, 2007—There has always been a good deal of confusion in the mainstream business press regarding radio frequency identification. Two years ago, you could read a story claiming RFID was going to revolutionize the supply chain in one publication, then read another saying it delivered no value at all.

These days, the confusion is over the pace of adoption. Some publications, including RFID Journal, report on successful implementations moving forward, while others claim RFID is a bust. The latter publications tend to focus on reports that Wal-Mart, the U.S. Department of Defense, Boeing and other early adopters are backing away from the technology.

To find out what's really happening, RFID Journal has invited representatives from each organization—and Hewlett-Packard, which has assumed a leadership role more recently—to participate in a unique panel at EPC Connection 2007, to be held in Chicago, Oct. 2-4. The panelists will be:

- **Carolyn Walton**, Wal-Mart's vice president of information systems
- **Didier Chenneveau**, vice president and general manager of Americas operations for Hewlett-Packard
- **Kenneth Porad**, associate technical fellow at Boeing

Our DOD participant has not yet been finalized.

At the conference, I plan to ask each panelist a number of questions, including: Are you getting real benefits today, and, if so, why aren't you rolling out the technology more quickly? What issues, if any, are slowing you down? What are you doing to overcome these issues—and what are your plans going forward?

I also plan to ask these folks specific questions, such as: Is Wal-Mart going to mandate that more companies tag more shipments, or will it move in a more collaborative way? Will HP roll out the system used at its factory in Brazil to other facilities, or was that a showcase to get customers to buy into the technology? When will Boeing require that parts be marked with RFID? And why aren't more DOD suppliers being required to tag shipments—and when will that change? In addition, I'll let audience members ask the questions on their minds as well.

RELATED_ARTICLES My goal for putting this session together is to allow these leaders to communicate directly with the audience, to share good information about the pace of adoption, without the filter of journalists interpreting what they say. If there are problems with a rollout, or if a company has changed course, that's fine. All companies shift their plans. But supply-chain partners, RFID vendors and even end users in other industries need to understand what's going on. These leaders have always been open about their plans, so I expect this session to be quite informative and valuable to all in attendance.

Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article, click on

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