

OAT Launches RFID Software for Tracking Work-in-Process

The product is designed to make it easier for companies to configure their RFID systems to track materials and goods, and to issue alerts and take other actions based on business needs.

By Beth Bacheldor

Sept. 18, 2007—OATSystems, based in Waltham, Mass., this week unveiled an RFID software product designed to help manufacturers keep close tabs on their work-in-process (WIP) and assets. The Asset Tracking and Work-in-Process Solution is intended to help improve supply chain processes, track deliveries, reduce errors and cut inventory levels, by making it easier for companies to configure how their RFID systems track materials throughout the manufacturing and distribution processes. A primary component of the software is a set of 80 pre-programmed use cases (business processes) that can be leveraged to model real-world business processes.

The software can trigger real-time alerts and other responses by comparing RFID data captures against rules created in the use cases. For instance, a clamps maker might choose to tag its clamps at the start of the manufacturing process and track the WIP. Using a Web-based graphical user interface (GUI), the company can define the locations at which interrogators will be installed to capture RFID tag data; define the products, parts or materials and their attributes; create associations between the RFID tags' unique ID numbers and the parts they represent; and add business logic to trigger an alert if a tagged clamp fails to reach a given point in the process within a specified amount of time.

The Asset Tracking and Work-in-Process Solution allows for alerts to be sent via e-mail or cell phones. It can also trigger lights mounted on light stacks—cylindrical posts that flash lights to indicate whether a process should keep running (typically green) or stop (typically red)—often found in manufacturing and distribution environments.

The prepackaged use cases can be modified via a high-level graphical tool, says Paul Cataldo, OATSystems' VP of marketing. "It is pretty easy for an end user to use, without having to resort to programming," Cataldo states. "For example, you might have a more involved case where the product you are tracking is going through multiple stages of assembly, so you might want to modify the process scenario." The software includes a series of reports and analytics so companies can monitor trends regarding WIP and distribution history.

The Asset Tracking and Work-in-Process Solution is built on a Service Oriented Architecture (SOA), a software framework or methodology for building business functionality and applications leveraging Web standards such as XML. As such, Cataldo says, it can be more easily integrated with back-end systems, such as enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems. The software runs on Windows or Linux operating systems and is configured to support a variety of RFID tag types, including passive, active and sensory tags. It also supports a range of RFID interrogators, including those compliant with the EPC Gen 2 UHF and ISO 15693 HF standards. The company is currently testing the software's support for Wi-Fi-based RFID tags and

interrogators, and plans to make such support a permanent feature.

OATSystems customer Hewlett-Packard (HP) plans to upgrade to the new software at its printer manufacturing plant in Brazil. To help it monitor these processes, HP currently uses OATSystems' OAT Foundation Suite 5.1, an RFID data-management platform integrated with HP's ERP system.

The company's RFID system in Brazil went into full production in August 2006. To date, says Marcelo Pandini, HP Brazil's manager of RFID and business development, HP has tagged more than 2 million printers assembled at Sao Paolo plant. The company expects that number to grow to 3 million by year's end. Since deploying the technology to track printers as they are assembled, HP Brazil estimates that it has reduced its printer inventory in the supply chain by 17 percent (see Best RFID Implementation: Keeping Tabs on Printers).

The software should help HP abide by the FIFO (first in, first out) principle, designed to ensure that products assembled first are those shipped out first. That's particularly important for HP, Pandini says, because its printers include printer cartridges with specific expiration dates. With the Asset Tracking and Work-in-Process Solution, he says, HP could create a use case in the software that incorporates the rules of FIFO and alerts the company in real-time if printers are shipped out of order.

The Asset Tracking and Work-in-Process Solution is available now. Pricing depends on the number of RFID readers running the software.

RELATED_ARTICLES Additionally, OATSystems says it has signed up at least six vendors to its OATedge Program, a marketing agreement enabling vendors to distribute their products bundled with the Asset Tracking and Work-in-Process Solution. For example, the company has partnered with Tyco Electronics, which will combine and sell products from its portfolio of RFID hardware with OATSystems' asset-tracking software. This, the partners report, will provide customers an integrated RFID solution that has been tested to make sure its components all work together.

Other partners in the program include Miles Technologies, Rush Tracking Systems, Domino ISG and the printer division at Avery Dennison.

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