

RFID News Roundup

EarthSearch Adds RFID to fleet-tracking solution; Sirit, 3M join forces in electronic vehicle registration; Convergent Technologies, Guard RFID Solutions partner on active RFID; BA Systems intros interrogator that reads UHF, HF tags and bar codes; SATO Integrates Intellex's BAP RFID into its tracking software; Australia and New Zealand CIOs rank RFID as a top technology.

Mar. 25, 2008—The following are news announcements made during the past week.

EarthSearch Adds RFID to Fleet-Tracking Solution

EarthSearch Communications International has integrated RFID into its GPS-based tracking system to improve its security and efficiency. EarthSearch Communications, based in Marietta, Ga., has added an RFID reader to its AutoSearch GPS system so companies can track individual vehicles, their drivers and the packages within those vehicles. The reader, made by WaveTrend, picks up the unique IDs stored in active 433 MHz RFID tags affixed to the packages, drivers and vehicles, and transmits that data, along with the location and time of activity, in real time via a GSM cellular communications link to EarthSearch Communications' servers housed in the company's data center in San Paulo, Brazil. By using RFID to track drivers, employers can identify drivers in a particular vehicle and connect activities of the vehicle such as mileage, number of stops, removal or addition of inventory, packages and material to a particular driver with time and location information, the company says. Companies can, for example, help reduce theft by having more detailed, real-time data on goods' whereabouts in transit, and also can analyze mileage information and stops and then modify routes to improve efficiencies. EarthSearch also says the RFID-enabled tracking solution has potential for industries such as the airline industry. Combining RFID and GPS technologies will let airlines identify and track the activities of the baggage handlers, assuring the right baggage is loaded on the right truck at the right time and into the right plane on the tarmac, the company says. In addition, the system can be used to help determine if a driver has loaded the correct number of baggage on the plane. AutoSearch GPS with RFID capability, which is designed to be customized based on individual customer needs, is currently undergoing field-testing and will be available within 90 days for installation.

Sirit, 3M Join Forces in Electronic Vehicle Registration

RFID technology provider Sirit has teamed up with 3M to provide RFID-enabled solutions for electronic vehicle registration (EVR) and electronic tolling. EVR, also known as electronic vehicle identification (EVI), is a growing market segment (see Electronic Vehicle Registration Picks Up Speed). EVR systems leverage passive RFID transponders—typically ultrahigh-frequency (UHF)—embedded in decals affixed to windshields or other parts of a vehicle. Fixed RFID interrogators installed at main traffic intersections or alongside roads, as well as handheld readers for use during traffic stops, can read the tags' unique ID numbers and then compare them with information in a back-end database to determine, for instance, who owns the vehicle, or if registration is up-to-date. In addition, tag reads collected over a period of time can help municipalities better understand traffic patterns and flow. The marketing agreement, between Sirit and 3M's Traffic Safety Systems Division, will enable 3M to distribute Sirit's IDentity 5100 reader and transponder solution, which leverages UHF RFID technology, as part of its traffic management and tolling solutions that also include systems integration and support. The companies say they will jointly target transportation markets in the Americas, Asia Pacific and Europe.

Convergent Technologies, GuardRFID Solutions Partner on Active RFID

GuardRFID Solutions, a Canadian maker of active RFID products for health-care organizations and other businesses, has signed a distribution agreement with Convergent Technologies, a systems integrator that provides, designs, services, and installs integrated building systems including electronic security, fire alarm and life safety, and building automation solutions. Convergent is based in Schaumburg, Ill., and has numerous offices throughout North America. Under terms of the agreement, Convergent will have access to GuardRFID's tracking, location and security solutions for the health-care market, as well as the ability to deploy such solutions into its other markets that require electronic security, fire alarm and life safety capabilities, and building automation systems. GuardRFID's products include TotGuard, a system of disposable, active RFID-enabled ankle and wrist bands designed to help hospitals protect the security of newborns while in the hospital, SafeGuard, an active RFID-enabled patient tracking system and OnGuard, a system that's designed to help hospitals track assets and hospital equipment using active RFID tags. All three support either Ethernet or Wi-Fi-based 802.11 local area networks. GuardRFID Solutions' tags transmit at 433 MHz, according to Zahir Abji, president and CEO of GuardRFID Solutions. "We primarily use our own proprietary protocol, which allows eight times faster transactions and therefore much greater tag population support," he adds.

BA Systems Intros Interrogator That Reads UHF, HF Tags and Bar codes

Upper Marlboro, Md.-based systems integrator and custom software and hardware developer BA Systems is offering a new handheld device that the company says is capable of reading both UHF and HF RFID tags as well as 1-D, 2-D, and data matrix bar code labels. The FlexID Reader has been designed for the pharmaceutical and retail markets that want to verify chain of custody of goods as they traverse the supply chain. Pharmaceutical companies in particular are under pressure via forthcoming electronic pedigree (e-pedigree) regulations to electronically document drugs as they leave the manufacturer and move through distribution and onto pharmacies. But capturing unique identification information throughout the supply chain often requires multiple technologies—HF for item-level tracking, UHF for case and pallet tracking, and bar codes where RFID technology is not yet installed. Until now, pharmaceutical companies have had to develop custom software and use multiple RFID readers and antennas to simultaneously interrogate both HF and UHF tags and capture bar-code data, a relatively expensive and complicated solution, according to BA Systems. Available now in limited quantities (with wide delivery via channel sales partners in the near future), BA's FlexID Reader is built on the Motorola XR Series RFID Reader. The reader includes the capability for future expansion by supplying USB ports for add-on hardware and remote sensing capabilities. BA is now working with partners to develop self-service kiosk, verification, and point-of-sale applications for the retail industry using the FlexID Reader.

SATO Integrates Intellex's BAP RFID Into Its Software

San Jose, Calif., RFID technology company Intellex, and SATO, a maker of bar code, RFID and GPS systems with offices in Charlotte, N.C., and around the world, have teamed to integrate Intellex's battery-assisted passive (BAP) RFID technology into SATO's i-TRAK software. Intellex's BAP RFID tags operate at the 902-928 MHz ultrahigh-frequency (UHF) band (865-868 MHz in Europe and India) and comply with EPCglobal's proposed Class 3 standard. SATO will integrate i-TRAK with Intellex's technology and will initially focus on fleet inventory and vehicle yard management applications, the companies say. SATO's i-TRAK is a hybrid (RFID and bar code) tracking and tracing software package that SATO developed initially for installation in one of the world's largest over-the-road (OTR) truck manufacturers and now offers commercially. Adding BAP capability will enable i-TRAK to receive and process data from BAP tags.

Australia and New Zealand CIOs Rank RFID as a Top Technology

In a recently released Forecast for Management, authored by market research and advisory firm IDC Australia, RFID took the number two spot in a top 10 list of technologies that CIOs in Australia and New Zealand expect to invest in by 2009. The study, conducted annually in Australia since the mid-1980s, asks CIOs a wide range of questions relating to their use of information technology, as well as expenditures and

challenges related to information technology (IT). The other technologies in the top 10 list are service-oriented architecture (SOA) and Web services (1), voice over IP (3), IT services quality certification (4), virtualization (5), storage over IP (6), sales force automation and marketing management (7), IT library (ITL) systems (8), document management (9), and online exchanges, marketplaces and portal technology (10).

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