

It's not about the technology—it's about what the technology can do.

By Mark Roberti

May 5, 2008—At [RFID Journal LIVE! 2008](#), we showed a three-screen video montage that began with images of numerous business problems, such as out-of-stock shelves and large piles of airline baggage. The video strongly suggested radio frequency identification could solve many of these problems—all of them, actually.

I told the audience I was of two minds about the video—it was a great introduction to the event, I said, but I felt a little uncomfortable with the evangelistic tone. "You might find this strange," I explained. "But I don't see myself as an evangelist for RFID. RFID is a tool, so to me being an evangelist for RFID is like being an evangelist for a hammer."



Ray Martino, chief technology officer for [Motorola's Enterprise Mobility division](#), spoke immediately thereafter and said, "I took exception when Mark said he is not an RFID evangelist. I'm very happy to say that I am [an evangelist for RFID.] The hammer probably needed an evangelist. Think about when the hammer came out—there probably weren't any nails. And there were probably stories that nails cost a buck, but if you could produce them in high volume, the price would fall to seven cents. And there was probably someone who had a soapbox and got on it and said, 'Don't make hammers because people will use them to hit other people on the head.' New technologies need evangelists."

Ray's analogy to privacy advocates opposing RFID got a big laugh. And you know, he's right—new technologies *do* need evangelists. When the polio vaccine was invented, people had to go around convincing doctors it worked, and that people should use it. And, sure enough, there were those who claimed injecting a virus into people was a nutty way to cure them.

So while I still don't see myself as an evangelist for RFID—I don't advocate that companies employ the technology simply for the sake of using it—I do see myself as a responsible journalist, and a publisher who promotes RFID where and when it can solve business problems. That distinction, to me, is very important.

I am acutely aware of the need to deliver value to our premium members, and to those who attend our events. And just saying RFID is great isn't going to cut it. Showing them how and where RFID delivers value, however, will get them to renew their premium membership, and to come back to our events. So will pointing out that RFID won't work for a specific application, or that a company is better off using bar codes or ultrasound technology. (I owe my friends at [Sonitor](#) a mention here, because I mistakenly said, at the event, that their products use infrared technology.)

Now, that might not be exactly what RFID companies that advertise on our Web site and in our magazine, or that exhibit at our events, want to hear. Their job, after all, is to sell RFID hardware, software and services. But the savvy ones understand that selling 1,000 interrogators, or a million tags, for an application that doesn't require such products won't earn them any loyalty. And the reality is that RFID delivers so much value, in so many applications and so many industries, that there's just no need to oversell it.

We conducted a survey of those who attended this year's LIVE! event, and asked, "Did you come away from this event with new ideas that could help your company make or save money?" Of the 157 people who responded, 78 percent said yes, while only 3 percent said no, with 19 percent undecided.

I feel very good about those numbers. Now, some may read the above statistics and say I'm an evangelist with converts, but I prefer to think of myself as a journalist and businessman who provides quality, objective information people can use to make smart business decisions. And the smart business decision for tracking assets, work-in-process and some products in the supply chain, as well as for many other applications, is to employ RFID. Amen.

Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article, click on the link below. To read more of Mark's opinions, visit the [RFID Journal Blog](#) or click [here](#).