

Xterprise Rolls Out IT Asset-Tracking Solution

The system, which combines software and EPC Gen 2 UHF RFID hardware, is designed to serve a rapidly growing demand.

By Mary Catherine O'Connor

July 31, 2008—Four or five years ago, RFID technology was more closely aligned with paper towels and bars of soap than it was with server blades and laptops. That's because it was [Wal-Mart's](#) mandate that its suppliers begin tagging cases of consumer goods that had pushed the technology into the mainstream news media. But using RFID to keep tabs on high-value IT assets owned by enterprises is emerging as one of the sleeper RFID applications that is now generating considerable interest among end users.

Major IT vendors [IBM](#) and [Hewlett-Packard](#) (HP) are among the companies that are both selling and employing RFID-based asset-tracking systems (see [HP Launches Service That Applies Tags to Items It Ships](#) and [IBM Offering IT Asset-Tracking Solution](#)). And the benefits both firms cite include improving asset utilization and helping public companies comply with the Sarbanes Oxley law.

Now [Xterprise](#), an RFID solutions provider based in Dallas, has announced its contribution to the growing market: the Clarity IT Asset Management (Clarity-ITAM) solution, which is generally available now and which, according to the company, is already being used by a number of undisclosed Fortune 100 companies. The system consists of software developed by Xterprise and RFID tags and interrogators that operate according to the EPC Gen 2 and ISO 18000-6c standards. The software is built on a [Microsoft](#) platform using the BizTalk Server 2006 R2 with BizTalk RFID middleware and a Microsoft SQL server.

Until recently, passive RFID tags—which are significantly cheaper and smaller than active tags and, therefore, more attractive for tracking large numbers of IT assets ranging in size from servers to portable hard drives—were too susceptible to RF interference from the metallic construction of IT assets to function in tracking applications. But improvements in tag design have changed that, and most IT asset-tracking solutions rolled out in recent months, including those of both IBM and HP, employ passive tags.

Like IBM, Xterprise is using special metal-mount tags made by [Omni-ID](#), but Xterprise CEO Dean Frew says he is studying the performance of other tag products as well and does not plan to limit the Clarity-ITAM offering to single RFID hardware vendors. Currently, the company is deploying fixed-position readers made by [Alien Technology](#) and mobile readers manufactured by [Motorola](#). Xterprise can work with customers who have their own RFID hardware preferences for their IT asset-tracking projects, as long as that hardware can support Microsoft's BizTalk platform—which, he adds, most major RFID manufacturers already support.

Clarity-ITAM is designed to interface with an end user's existing network asset-management system—software that shows the customer how many IT assets are plugged into their network at any particular time, as well as additional information such as the assets' configurations and maintenance schedules. "But when an asset is unplugged from the network," Frew says, "the company's visibility of that asset ends, and that is where Clarity-ITAM starts."

Readers are installed at chokepoints, such as doorways or corridors, so an end user can monitor the location of each tagged asset when it is moved. And using mobile readers, staff members can perform periodic inventory counts of assets within a data center as well. All of this data is stored in the Clarity-ITAM software and interfaces with the end user's existing network asset-management system.

RELATED_ARTICLES Financial services is one industry Xterprise believes can greatly benefit from employing its RFID-based IT asset-tracking platform. In fact, to help guide the deployment of RFID for tracking IT assets among financial services companies, Xterprise recently joined the Financial Services Technology Consortium (FSTC), which is developing standards and defining best practices for the use of RFID technology in the financial services industry (see Banking Group to Set RFID Roadmap). The market for the Clarity-ITAM solution, Frew says, extends well beyond financial services companies. "Any company, such as a business process outsourcing firm, or a large hosting company firm" would benefit, he says.

The Xterprise product announcement comes on the heels of a survey conducted by market research firm Aberdeen Group that probes the business practices leading to the most successful deployments of RFID as part of an enterprise IT infrastructure. That study, according to Aberdeen Group, shows that tracking IT assets, such as server blades and laptop computers, is the most popular use of radio frequency identification among the survey's more than 135 respondents—and a full 80 percent of those who also read *RFID Journal* indicated they are currently tracking or plan to track IT assets with RFID.

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