

GE Healthcare buys RTLS vendor Agility Healthcare Solutions; DecaWave announces IEEE standards-based UWB chips; Libercard, ViVOTech and InteligenSA team on Brazilian NFC project; Inside Contactless unveils NFC stickers; ABI Research says compliance is still primary driver for RFID adoption.

Oct. 9, 2008—The following are news announcements made during the past week.

GE Healthcare Buys RTLS Vendor Agility Healthcare Solutions

[GE Healthcare](#), a unit of [General Electric](#), has announced that it is acquiring [Agility Healthcare Solutions](#), a privately held provider of RFID-based asset-tracking and workflow improvement applications for hospitals. Financial terms were not disclosed. "We scoured this industry [for a real-time location systems (RTLS) solutions provider], and we saw Agility as the best in what they are doing," says Rob Reilly, general manager of GE Healthcare. "This acquisition is about broadening our footprint, and about solving the big problems our customers face." Fran Dirksmeier, CEO of Agility Healthcare Solutions, says the two companies are "extremely complementary," and that the acquisition "allows us to expand our solution set with a great partner and fit into the 'hospital of the future' strategy that GE Healthcare has." That strategy includes creating RFID-enabled systems for the health-care market that can turn RFID and other real-time data into actionable information. "Where we want to go, longer-term, is to take the real-time abilities that RFID systems provide and make them predictive," Reilly says. "With these systems, we can view big issues in hospitals that are brewing, such as emergency room backup issues, and analyze these issues to make predictions on patient flow and know what's happening eight hours before they become problems." The acquisition will not alter GE Healthcare's strategy to continue working with a variety of RFID hardware vendors. That includes GE Healthcare's partnership with RTLS vendor [WhereNet](#) to offer IntelliMotion, an RFID asset-tracking system comprised of 2.45 GHz active RFID tags compliant with the ISO 24730 standard; location sensors, which act as tag interrogators and locators; and exciters, which serve to wake up tags in a dormant, energy-saving mode. GE Healthcare has integrated and sells this hardware, made by WhereNet, with its IntelliMotion Web-based asset-tracking software (see [Emory Healthcare Tracks Its Pumps](#) and [The Lahey Clinic's RFID Remedy](#)). "One important distinction we need to make is that we will use all kinds of different hardware vendors," Reilly says. "Ultimately, this isn't about tags and readers. This is about solving customers' problems with solutions." Both GE Healthcare and Agility Healthcare are supplying RFID solutions to hospitals; Agility Healthcare, for instance, has deployed its RTLS at [HCA North Florida Division](#), which consists of nine hospitals in northern Florida and eight in southern Georgia and is part of [Hospital Corporation of America](#) (HCA), one of the country's largest providers of health-care services. HCA North Florida is employing the system to monitor the whereabouts of movable assets, and to keep tabs on its patients (see [HCA North Florida Expands Its RTLS to Track Patients](#)).

DecaWave Announces IEEE Standards-based UWB Chips

[DecaWave](#), an Irish semiconductor startup specializing in ultra-wideband (UWB) real-time location services (RTLS), has announced its first product, ScenSor. The prototype chip, which supports the IEEE 802.15.4a standard, can be embedded in a wireless access point and provides the ability to track and locate up to 11,000 assets in a radius of 20 meters (about 65 feet) and to a precision of 10

centimeters (about 3.9 inches). The IEEE 802.15.4a standard is an amendment that adds specifications for two additional physical layers using UWB and Chirp Spread Spectrum (CSS) to the IEEE 802.15.4 standard for wireless personal area networks (WPAN). Such networks consist of mobile devices that wirelessly communicate with each other over a short distance, transmitting data at a low bit rate—up to 250 kilobits per second—over six channels in the 2.4 GHz ISM band, 10 channels in the 915 MHz band and one channel in the 868 MHz band. The IEEE 802.15.4 is the same specification on which the ZigBee protocol is based. DecaWave's CEO, Ciaran Connell, says that by January 2009, his firm plans to deliver its ScenSor prototype to five makers of wireless LAN and ZigBee products (NDAs prevent DecaWave from naming these companies). By January 2010, the company expects to have production-ready chips available. "The RTLS market is made up of various technologies, but the industry needs precision. It also needs standards," says Connell, adding that UWB-based RTLS systems now available utilize proprietary technology. "Our technology will allow for systems that significantly outperform, cost less and use less power than what is currently available." He says the chips will cost €2 (\$2.70) or less. Add in the antenna and battery, and Connell expects the cost for a tag to be in the range of €3 to €4 (\$4 to \$4.50). A tag developed with DecaWave's chip, he adds, is expected to run on a watch battery that will last for up to ten years.

Libercard, ViVOtech and Inteligensa Team on Brazilian NFC Project

Near Field Communications (NFC) vendor [ViVOtech](#), [Inteligensa](#), a provider payment systems and authentication solutions, and Brazilian company [Libercard](#) are working together on a contactless payment project. The project has created a contactless payment card that Brazilians in the city of Fortaleza can use to ride local transit and make retail purchases. The project extends existing contactless prepaid cards already being used for public transit, so that cardholders can pay for purchases at several hundred retail stores in that city. With the first 20,000 pilot cards, more than \$2.5 million in purchases were made in three months' time, and Libercard intends to issue another 20,000 cards by year's end, eventually replacing the 1.5 million transit-only cards currently in use with the Libercard dual-use cards. ViVOtech is providing its ViVOpay 5000 readers, which accept prepaid payments for purchases and for reloading both transit and payment accounts, as well as its branded contactless EMV payment cards. EMV is a payment protocol; the acronym is derived from the names of the three companies that developed it: EuroPay, MasterCard and Visa.

Inside Contactless Unveils NFC Stickers

[Inside Contactless](#), a French provider of contactless chip technologies, has announced the availability of samples of its MicroPass contactless sticker form factor, which is designed for card manufacturers and can turn mobile phones, company IDs and other items into contactless payment devices. The sticker technology combines the MicroPass 4003 contactless payment platform with a tuned RF antenna and shielding designed to improve performance by protecting the chip and antenna inside the sticker from interference that might be caused by the radio signals used by mobile phones and other electronic devices. The company believes the stickers offer a promising bridge to introduce contactless payment capability in advance of NFC-enabled mobile handsets that will have payment chips already built in. Currently available are Inside MicroPass 4003-S sticker prelams—pre-laminated inlays comprising all of the required electronic components, such as a microchip and an antenna, found in an

RFID smart card or contactless card. Initial rollouts of the stickers are expected to start by end of 2008.

ABI Research Says Compliance is Still Primary Driver for RFID Adoption

While many consumer packaged goods (CPG) manufacturers and retailers are still deploying radio frequency identification simply to comply with industry mandates such as those from [Wal-Mart](#), there is evidence that companies are now being influenced to implement RFID for their own good, according to a new survey conducted by [ABI Research](#). The benefits cited include RFID's ability to improve business processes and reduce the need for human intervention in such tasks as taking inventory. The study focuses on supply chain management, promotions management, and execution applications, and is based on responses from 37 retail consumer goods manufacturers. It estimates the global market for RFID supply chain management applications in the retail CPG vertical will exceed \$286 million this year, with spending reaching nearly \$726 million in 2013. About 43 percent of respondents are currently using, evaluating/piloting, or planning to install RFID systems, and another 14 percent are not currently using RFID but have tested or piloted the technology. While two-thirds are supporting and/or investigating case- and pallet-level tracking, ABI Research says there are a growing number of companies for whom tagging individual items creates immediate value. In fact, about 38 percent of respondents are supporting, piloting, or planning to install item-level tracking applications within the next year. According to ABI Research, these respondents largely compete in consumer electronics and other manufacturing where goods are high-risk and high-value. Those companies not using or evaluating item-level tracking are primarily focused on manufacturing low-cost, low-risk consumer goods. That said, reasons for holding off on RFID continue to persist. Of the respondents who are not currently using or have never utilized RFID technology, 33 percent cited the lack of application requirements, 19 percent mentioned tag cost, 14 percent said an alternative automatic ID and data collection was already in place, and another 14 percent cited a lack of demonstrable ROI, among other reasons. A white paper based on the study is available for free download [here](#).