

An RFID Policy for the New Administration

In preparation for the presidency, Barack Obama gets a little advice on what the United States needs to do about radio frequency identification.

By Mark Roberti

Nov. 10, 2008—I received a phone call the other day. I'm not sure if it was a prank, or if I was dreaming, but the conversation went like this:

"Mark Roberti, *RFID Journal*."

"Mark, this is Barack Obama. I'm calling about—"

"Yeah, and I'm Santa Claus."

"No really. It's Barack. I've been going through a list of issues my aides prepared for me. RFID is on the list, and they said you were the guy I should talk to."

"Get out—"

"What do I need to know about radio frequency identification?"

"Well, for one thing, you should know it's not as important as fixing the banking system, cutting taxes and bringing peace to the Middle East."

"Yes, thank you, I know that. What should my administration do, if anything, about RFID? I understand there are privacy concerns."

"Yes, there are, but this is one area where market forces will work. Companies won't spy on customers because they want to keep their customers."

"So we don't need to do anything?"

"Don't do anything about privacy until there's a problem. There are three things you can do to help foster positive use of the technology. First, cough up some funding for RFID studies. Europe has been funding studies that involve private industry. So have Asian governments. But the United States has done very little, and that's put us behind in a technology that could be critical to future competitiveness. You don't have to spend a lot —\$15 million would suffice to fund a real-world project.

"Second, instruct the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to work with the states and the pharmaceutical industry to develop a phased approach to employing RFID to capture information for drug pedigrees. Radio frequency identification can help improve efficiencies, as well as secure the drug supply chain—and it will, if it's done right. If you try to ram it down the industry's throat, you'll have a real problem. Make it a win-win

scenario.

"Third, create a national RFID policy. We have a national policy for nanotechnology—we need one for RFID as well. That means government agencies would be instructed to use standards that are also being adopted by the private sector. And it means a coordination of activities among researchers throughout the United States, and perhaps some money for creating a Web site and platform for sharing information regarding RFID projects around the country."

"That all sounds reasonable. Essentially, we could put up \$15 million and do a better job of getting government agencies and industry to work together for securing the supply chain and improving supply chain efficiencies. Is that it?"

"Yes. And one more thing: You've been promoting the idea of investing in technology to make the health-care system more efficient. Well, RFID can help reduce costs by improving asset tracking and patient monitoring. If you offer tax incentives, and perhaps research grants, to teaching hospitals, that could have a real impact on costs in the short and long term."

"Mark, this is all very helpful. Thank you. Is there anything I could do for you?"

"Yeah, actually, there is. Could you mention *RFID Journal* in your inaugural address?"

"I'll have someone on my staff get back to you about that."

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](#).

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