

**The economic tumult dominated the news in 2008, but there were still many positive developments in the RFID industry.**

By Mark Roberti

Dec. 22, 2008—It's been a wild year, dominated by the shockwaves that ripped through the global financial system, and the swift erosion of consumer confidence and spending that followed. As I speak to people in the industry, I hear that some companies either postponed or canceled their RFID projects after the downturn. Despite the economic problems, however, it was a year of progress for end users of radio frequency identification and technology providers alike.

RFID continues to see tremendous innovation. This year saw new interrogators, as well as enhancements to existing devices that can detect the directional movement of ultrahigh-frequency (UHF) tags and locate tags in 3-D space (see [Alien Software Adds Context to Tag Reads](#)). And scientists at [GE Global Research](#), a division of the [General Electric Co.](#), announced that they have developed a high-frequency (HF) 13.56 MHz passive RFID tag with an antenna capable of functioning as multiple sensors (see [GE Develops Passive Tag That Functions as Multiple Sensors](#)).



We also saw innovations that will make RFID systems easier to deploy. [Verayo](#), for instance, introduced "unclonable" tags designed for anti-counterfeiting and other applications in which it's imperative to be certain someone has not created a duplicate tag (see [PUF Technology Catches Clones](#)).

These are just a few examples.

As I predicted a year ago in this column, 2008 was not a year in which tagging for compliance was a major driver in the RFID market (see [A Better Year Ahead](#)). But 2008 was the year closed-loop applications caught on. Many companies now understand the value of tagging returnable transport containers, assets, tools, work in process and more within their own four walls. Hospitals, industrial manufacturers, retailers, apparel companies and others installed RFID systems of all flavors—passive HF, passive UHF, active real-time location systems (RTLS), Wi-Fi and so forth—to improve internal efficiencies. We will highlight many of these case studies at [RFID Journal LIVE! 2009](#), to be held in Orlando on April 28-29.

This year, we saw a greater interest in RFID among apparel retailers and manufacturers. The benefits of using radio frequency identification to manage in-store inventory was always clear—at least to me—but many apparel companies were either scared off by opponents of RFID, or too absorbed with other projects to launch RFID efforts. Still, [American Apparel](#) recently announced plans to extend the rollout it began this year (see [American Apparel Expands RFID to Additional Stores](#)), and many other apparel companies launched pilots that demonstrated a clear return on investment. The [Voluntary Interindustry Commerce Solutions Association](#) (VICS) has been doing a commendable job of supporting

such pilots.

In the health-care sector, we saw many hospitals adopt various types of RFID systems to monitor patients, automate billing, manage inventory and increase asset utilization in medical facilities. We also saw a surge in interest in tracking assets in data centers. The financial industry has even published a proposed standard for tagging IT assets (see [Financial Consortium Publishes RFID Standards for IT Assets](#)).

Overall, as I examine *RFID Journal's* internal data, I see no noticeable decline in the number of registered users or subscribers, or the amount of traffic to our Web site, which means interest in RFID remains strong despite the economic crisis. In fact, there has been a noticeable increase in registered users from the oil and gas and utilities industries, as well as from engineering and construction firms.

I attribute this growth to the maturity of the RFID market. Increasingly, companies in a number of sectors have come to understand that radio frequency identification can do a lot more than just track boxes in the supply chain.

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