

The six applications are designed to help companies track, monitor, manage and secure their servers and other IT equipment and parts.

By Beth Bacheldor

Dec. 31, 2008—[PC Guardian](#), a long-time provider of computer and data security products, including physical anti-theft solutions, is introducing in January a new RFID-enabled suite designed to help companies track, monitor, manage and secure their servers and other IT assets around the clock, from cradle to grave.

Called IT Professional Asset Manager, or IT Pro Asset, the suite is built on [Fluensee's](#) RFID-based asset-tracking software, which can leverage active and passive RFID, ultra-wideband (UWB) technology, Wi-Fi-based systems, GPS and sensor technologies. The two companies announced a partnership in early December; PC Guardian is licensing Fluensee's software and is using that software as the platform for IT Pro Asset.



Noah Groth

Noah Groth, PC Guardian's chairman of the board says RFID—and specifically Fluensee's software—is providing the company with the tools needed to broaden PC Guardian's offerings. "We think RFID is another great area to expand our business," says Groth. "We see ourselves as a systems integrator with respect to RFID, and we are putting together what we think are the best products and then we'll help customers put the solution together."

A number of developments have forged opportunity for RFID's use in the IT center, says Groth. In particular, technical developments have made it possible for companies to leverage more cost-effective, industry-standard EPC Gen 2 passive UHF tags rather than the more expensive active RFID tags. Until recently, companies were limited to active RFID tags because passive UHF versions did not perform well on IT assets containing metal, which can interfere with RF waves. But a growing number of metal-mount tags, specifically designed to mitigate metal's interference, have come on the market and are offering companies new options.

Recently, RFID systems integrator [ODIN Technologies](#) conducted a study that showed that passive EPC Gen 2 RFID tags and interrogators can be effective for tracking IT assets (see [ODIN Report Reveals EPC RFID's Effectiveness for Tracking IT Assets](#)). Groth says PC Guardian purchased the study to compare ODIN's results with results from some studies PC Guardian had conducted independently. "Our results were surprisingly similar," he says. "This is an evolution in the RFID space. The tags weren't working [for IT asset tracking] before, and now they are."

With PC Guardian's IT Pro Asset, companies can use active tags—which might be needed if companies want to do real-time location tracking for security purposes—but Groth says passive tags work well for monitoring and inventory counts. "What RFID really does is enable you to get a handle on the your IT

inventory as well as the physical location of where all of those IT assets are. And you can even do that 24-7." The costs of passive EPC Gen 2 tags have also come down, making the technology more palatable for IT departments. But Groth is quick to point out that because RFID is going to replace manual procedures of tracking assets using bar codes, and more often, physical counts, that are time-consuming and involve costly labor, RFID's return-on-investment should be easily achieved. "There are things RFID does that can't be done with other systems. RFID is a no-brainer when the cost for RFID is low enough. Cost may have been a problem in the past, but we see that changing today."

PC Guardian's new suite consists of six modules: IT Pro Asset On Demand, IT Pro Asset 24/7, IT Pro Asset Provisioning, IT Pro Asset Mobile, IT Pro Asset Parts and IT Pro Asset Data Center. IT Pro Asset On Demand lets companies use either active or passive RFID readers and tags to take inventory of their IT assets, and includes software to track and maintain that inventory. On Demand includes a specific offering that uses [RF Code's](#) 433 MHz active RFID tags, handheld readers and middleware to provide companies with asset visibility and security around the clock. Using the handheld reader, which has lights that indicate signal strength, users can find a tagged asset's specific location by taking the reader to the area that the asset is supposed to be in, and then letting the reader guide the user to the asset by following the light indicators on the handheld.

IT Pro Asset 24/7 includes [RF Code's](#) 433 MHz active RFID tags and fixed readers to track the physical location of IT assets, typically to a zone or room. By installing the fixed readers throughout the facility, or area in which assets are to be tracked, companies can view where their assets are by accessing the IT Pro Asset software to see a real-time inventory of assets and asset locations. "This really is an active tag solution, providing visibility and security of assets around the clock," Groth says. "But we aren't really, at this stage, advocating what people refer to as more of the location technologies—triangulation, ultra-wideband, Wi-Fi—because typically IT is not willing to pay for these real-time location systems. An IT department isn't like a hospital that needs to know exactly where the heart pump is because someone needs it for the next patient. So visibility provided by IT Pro Asset 24/7 is more based on a zone or building."

IT Pro Asset Provisioning is designed to help companies check in new IT assets as they are received, using EPC Gen 2 tags and fixed reader portals. When new IT hardware is delivered, companies typically have to unpack it, check to see if it works, configure it, and then prepare it for deployment. "What IT Pro Asset Provisioning does is help companies track the assets as they move along these processes," Groth explains, "so you know where they are in those processes and so they don't end up in a closet somewhere, waiting."

For now, Groth says most companies will have to tag their own IT assets, but hardware manufacturers are starting to tag their products and are following standards set forth by [The Financial Services Technology Consortium](#) (FSTC), a New York-based organization comprising North American financial institutions, technology vendors, research groups and government agencies. FSTC has just published a set of standards for implementing RFID-based systems to track IT assets within data centers (see [Financial Consortium Publishes RFID Standards for IT Assets](#)).

IT Pro Asset Mobile is designed to help companies track and monitor mobile assets, and involves EPC Gen 2 RFID portals and tags. Typically, the portals will be positioned at doorways and entryways to track when mobile assets leave and come into areas. The portals could read EPC Gen 2-enabled employee badges as well, so companies could not only know when a mobile asset left a building, but who was removing that asset as well.

IT Pro Asset Parts is designed to help companies track peripheral equipment and spare parts that are typically stored in specific rooms or in cages. The solution features RF Code's active tags and fixed readers, which capture all the tags in that room, keeping a running tally of the inventory. When someone takes an item from the room, that person removes the item's tag and puts it into a bin that then blocks the tag's signal from being picked up by the reader, subtracting that tag's unique ID number, and therefore the item, from the inventory count. If a worker walks out of the room with the tag still attached, the reader will no longer be able to read the tag's signal, again prompting the system to subtract that tag's unique ID number from the inventory count. The reader is just powerful enough to read tags in the inventory area, and a typical maximum read distance is about 50 feet or less. "Companies can have instant visibility about what is in the inventory at any time, and what they might need to order so they always have the necessary parts on hand," says Groth. "That can save a company a lot of time and money, and they can reuse the active tags over and over again."

IT Pro Asset Data Center is similar to IT Pro Asset Provisioning, except it is more focused on equipment, such as servers and racks, designated for the data center. "Companies can track the assets as they are moved into the data center, and once the passive tags have been affixed to these devices, companies can do inventory in the data center using a mobile, handheld reader," says Groth.

PC Guardian is unveiling the new suite of products as part of its new RFID division. The company has not signed on any new customers, but Groth says over the past 25 years, PC Guardian has secured and protected more than 25 million IT assets in large and midsize organizations worldwide. Customers include some of the largest commercial organizations in the world, as well millions of computers in all branches of the U.S. military, he says.

Related Articles

[Researchers Develop Power-Storing Passive Tags](#)

[Moversa Debuts Universal NFC Chip](#)

[Health-Care Provider Survey Quantifies RTLS Uptake, Interest](#)

[Jump-Start Your Deployment](#)