

The three end-user companies that won our 2009 RFID Journal Awards are quite different, yet all had similar strategies leading to their success.

By Mark Roberti

May 25, 2009—The May/June issue of *RFID Journal's* [print magazine](#) will feature case studies of the three end-user companies that won the [2009 RFID Journal Awards](#), handed out at this year's [RFID Journal LIVE!](#) event (see [Vögele, Vail, FOCUS and ODIN Technologies Win RFID Journal Awards](#)).

One goal of the awards is to show how radio frequency identification can be used to benefit a wide array of business, and that's certainly true with our winners, which work in the hospitality, publishing and retail industries. Yet, as I read the articles, it was clear all three winners conducted their projects in a similar way, and that led to their success. Here are the strategies they had in common, which should become best practices for everyone.



An open-minded approach. Each winner—[Charles Vögele Group](#), [Vail Resorts](#) and [Focus Magazine](#)—began with a goal and kept an open mind about how to achieve it. These companies did not get locked into a particular technology or system, and were willing to go in new directions to achieve their goals. Vail, for instance, wanted to replace the bar-code equipment it used with lift tickets with an RFID system. But rather than install gates to read high-frequency (HF) tags, as most other ski resorts have done, Vail opted for an ultrahigh-frequency (UHF) system that was less intrusive for the skiers and more cost-effective for the company.

A team effort. The award winners showed that it's critical to engage your hardware and software vendors as partners. [Checkpoint Systems](#) was so vital to Charles Vögele's efforts to track goods from source to point of sale that Thomas Beckmann, the retail chain's head of supply chain, invited Checkpoint representatives on stage to accept the award with him. [Infineon Technologies](#), meanwhile—which was sold to [RF-iT Solutions](#)—took on the challenge of helping *Focus* devise a system that could record when someone was looking at ads on particular pages.

Vail Resorts showed that it's critical to engage not only RFID partners, but also employees in different departments. Its operation team, which would use the RFID equipment, provided critical input. That group's support for switching to RFID helped secure funding for the project.

Rigorous testing and a willingness to adapt. Achieving a high level of read accuracy was critical in all three winning deployments. Each company worked with its partners to conduct rigorous testing, and each encountered problems. Vail had to deal with multiple tag reads from handhelds, as well as missed reads from fixed interrogators. *Focus* struggled with the close proximity of tags on magazine pages. And Vögele had issues with reading tags on large numbers of clothing items in boxes. In each case, the

company and its partners adapted and found ways to achieve the desired read rates.

A focus on a system that could be replicated. RFID systems are improving year after year, but the technology is not yet plug-and-play. Still, our award winners did not want to create a system that was so highly customized that it would work only for the current project. Vail Resorts sought a solution that would work on all of its mountains at all five of its resorts. *Focus* wanted a solution that could be used by other publications. And Vögele was looking for a system that would work with any of its suppliers, and in all of its stores. Each succeeded in this regard, by rejecting one-off solutions and focusing on a system that could be replicated.

All of our winners achieved their initial objectives. Charles Vögele succeeded in reducing its supply chain costs. *Focus* was able to gather accurate data regarding how often—and how long—its subscribers spent reading the magazine and looking at ads. And Vail improved the customer experience by eliminating the need to fumble for lift tickets; what's more, it also captured valuable information that will enable the resort to improve its marketing efforts.

If you plan to start an RFID rollout, these are all good practices to follow. For more information about how to make sure your RFID project succeeds, visit the [Best Practices](#) section of our Web site.

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](#).