

First-time purchasers of the company's Wi-Fi-based real-time locating system can try it for 30 days, then, if not pleased with the results, get the installation fixed to their satisfaction for free, or receive a full refund.

By Claire Swedberg

Feb. 5, 2010—Businesses that still have doubts regarding whether real-time locating systems (RTLS) designed to manage assets or individuals would work in their facility now have a risk-free option to purchase a system without any guarantees, or to launch a limited pilot to test the technology on a small scale. [Ekahau](#), a provider of Wi-Fi-based RTLS technology, is bringing a 30-day refundable option to market, offering a provision that, if the system fails to meet a user's needs, the company will correct the problem at no cost—or remove the system and refund the customer's money. Ekahau claims its Zero-Risk System Guarantee is the first 30-day guarantee offering in the RTLS market.

This guarantee will enable companies not clear about the benefits of an RTLS to give the technology a try, says Tuomo Rutanen, Ekahau's senior VP of worldwide marketing and business development. The new offering provides an alternative to the pilots many firms launch to test out a system and determine its effectiveness before committing to buying a full system. In a large business such as a hospital, Rutanen says, pilots that are run in small sections of one building, such as on a particular floor or several floors, do not offer a clear indication of just how the system would work across the entire building or campus. In addition, he adds, "pilots do have expenses; they take time, money and effort."

Ekahau can afford to make such an offer due to the nature of the technology it provides. The system requires very little infrastructure, the company reports, since it leverages existing Wi-Fi access points. That, Rutanen explains, means Ekahau does not have to install RFID interrogators or infrared (IR) sensors around a facility.

What's more, before making a proposal, the company conducts a survey of the facility's wireless network, to predict the system's performance. Ekahau uses a tool known as the Ekahau Site Survey (ESS) to measure and analyze a facility's Wi-Fi network layout, thereby ensuring there is sufficient Wi-Fi coverage before commencing an installation. To accomplish this survey, Ekahau utilizes a Wi-Fi-enabled laptop loaded with the ESS software and an electronic (CAD) drawing of the facility's floor plan. An individual then walks the laptop around each of the building's floors, repeatedly inputting the computer's location and measuring the signal strength at each spot.

After this site audit is completed, Ekahau can predict RTLS performance in that facility and provide a comprehensive report that is the basis of the guarantee. If a site's existing Wi-Fi system turns out to be inadequate, Ekahau or the hospital would install additional Wi-Fi access points, but in approximately 95 percent of the cases, Rutanen says, the existing coverage is sufficient. Once the customer purchases and installs the necessary battery-powered Wi-Fi RFID tags and software (as well as additional access points, if necessary), it has 30 days to determine if the RTLS provides the performance its business requires. If not, Ekahau will fix the problem at no cost, or remove the system components and refund

the end user for those components, as well as for the site survey and any installation costs the client may have been charged.

The company has already provided the system to several customers that opted for the Zero-Risk System Guarantee, and expects the guarantee will lead to additional orders for its RTLS technology, from companies in the health-care, manufacturing, logistics and hospitality industries. Health care has seen the greatest growth in RTLS usage, Rutanen notes, so he expects to see the most activity in that industry.

RTLS technology is currently the highest growth segment in RFID, says Michael Liard, [ABI Research's](#) practice director for RFID, with a compounded annual growth rate of 28 percent forecasted for the period from 2009 to 2014, according to a study conducted by the research firm. Not all RTLS customers have applications that would be well suited for a Wi-Fi-based RTLS, however—for example, a business that requires high granularity (the ability to pinpoint a tag's location within a room, for instance) might not be happy with a Wi-Fi-based solution. Still, Liard says, those inclined to use Wi-Fi RTLS RFID tags might be encouraged to employ a system provided by a vendor that has enough faith in the product to provide a guarantee. While 30 days may not be long enough to determine a return on investment, he notes, it could offer customers an opportunity to ensure that the technology works.

"I think it's great whenever a vendor backs up its technology—that's good news for the vendor and the customer," Liard states. If an offer like this leads to a significant increase in Ekahau's business, he adds, other vendors may feel the pressure to make a similar offer as well.