

MARC Adds RFID to Supply Chain

Supply chain software maker MARC Global debuts solutions to meet Wal-Mart and DOD mandates and tie RFID data to enterprise applications.

By Jonathan Collins

Jan. 20, 2004—Supply chain execution application specialist MARC Global has launched its first RFID-capable offerings, partnering with EPC pioneer OATSystems to deliver RFID connectivity. Under the terms of the partnership, MARC will sell OATSystems' Senseware RFID middleware to connect its supply chain applications to an installed RFID network. Supporting readers from 21 different reader vendors, Senseware provides data filtering and device management and monitoring as well as a way of linking MARC's applications to RFID deployments.

"If we had tried to develop the functionality that OATSystems brings, it would have taken us more than three years, and even then it probably wouldn't be as good. We have partnered instead so we can concentrate our efforts on our core product suite," says Oliver Cooper, CEO of MARC Global, which is based in Dulles, Va. The company announced the partnership, as well as its two RFID products, at the National Retail Federation Convention & Expo held last week in New York City.

MARC's first offering targets consumer goods makers and other suppliers looking to meet Wal-Mart and Department of Defense mandates requiring the placement of tags on shipments of pallets and cases. The RFID Compliance Kit enables the ability to write to RFID Electronic Product Code (EPC) tags either during the packaging process or at shipment, and allows automatic verification of content and delivery. It also meets Wal-Mart and DOD requirements for EPC management, tag-quality assurance, case-to-pallet linkage and EPC-enabled advance ship notices. The software supports Class 0 and Class 1 readers.

The company believes, however, that the real benefits of RFID deployment will follow only from the greater integration of RFID into supply chain applications. "Compliance [with the Wal-Mart and DOD mandates] alone can mean spending \$3 million to \$4 million a year on tags and little or no value back from that investment," says Cooper.

In order to achieve greater benefits from RFID deployment, MARC maintains that companies must more tightly tie in RFID data with enterprise applications. To enable this greater integration, it launched the MARC RFID Enterprise Edition, which provides the necessary application programming interfaces (APIs) to connect with MARC's existing SCE applications.

"With the Enterprise Edition, companies can deploy RFID-based systems that can deliver a range of business benefits such as reducing spoilage, with zone alerts that can report when perishable goods are not in a cooler, or keeping regulated materials such as narcotics under tight control, with alerting when they are not in a secure zone," says Cooper.

MARC's RFID offerings can be added only to MARC supply chain applications, but the company believes the RFID capabilities of its software combined with OATSystems' Senseware could provide an incentive for companies to rethink and even replace their existing supply chain applications supplied by other vendors.

“Once companies [using competitors’ SCE software] try to process the transaction data volume that RFID will bring, they are likely to come up against architectural issues in their existing WMS systems, such as the inability to process all the data quickly enough. There are issues of scalability in adding RFID that we have already tackled with our own product architecture, and our competitors have not,” says Cooper.

MARC supply chain execution suite includes solutions for warehouse management, transportation management and inventory distribution optimization, and the company counts Philips, Mars, Ford and Glaxo among its customers. The company competes against established SCE specialist Manhattan Associates and Red Prairie.

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