RFID News Roundup

Topics/Verticals: RFID Channel

Invengo expands into Europe, announces new RFID-enabled jewelry tag; UMHS expands use of RTLS to track tissue; Confidex supplies contactless tickets to Atlanta transit authority; TazTag intros new TazCard contactless portable device with built-in ZigBee; Melexis, Proxima RF team up on RFID sensor kit; Sirit, RF Controls offer RTLS for EPC Gen 2 tags.

Mar. 11, 2010—The following are news announcements made during the past week.

Invengo Expands into Europe, Announces New RFID-enabled Jewelry Tag
Chinese RFID hardware manufacturer Invengo is continuing its expansion in Europe with a distribution agreement with Miles Technologies, a Barcelona, Spain, company specializing in RFID technology and offering a range of RFID products. Invengo first announced plans to expand operations in Europe in September 2009 (see RFID News Roundup: Invengo Announces UHF Reader that Supports Wi-Fi, GPRS, Bluetooth). Under the terms of the latest distribution agreement, Miles Technologies will be the sole distributor of Invengo's full range of RFID inlays, tags, smart cards and readers throughout France, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey and some other Eastern or Northern European countries. "We chose to work with Invengo as we know that they have a vast amount of product design experience," said Ignasi Barba, Miles Technologies' founder and CEO, in a prepared statement. "With their manufacturing plants in China, we can expect to be able to offer very competitive pricing. In addition, we aim to be able to ship most products within one to three days, and that will allow our resellers to maintain minimum stocking levels." Invengo introduced a new version of its passive jewelry tag, the XCRF-8108-C04, tuned to operate at 860 MHz to 915 MHz, so it can perform equally well in Europe and North America, says Philip Calderbank, the company's VP of sales and marketing. The jewelry tag contains an Impinj Monza 3 chip conforming to the EPC Gen 2 and ISO 18000-6C standards, offers a read range of up to 1.2 meters (3.9 feet) and provides sufficient memory for a 96-bit EPC number and a 32-bit tag identifier (TID).

UMHS Expands Use of RTLS to Track Tissue
The University of Michigan Health System (UMHS) is expanding its use of an RFID-based system for tissue tracking, provided by Mobile Aspects. In 2009, UMHS's University Hospital installed three Mobile Aspects RFID-enabled cabinets in its adult surgical area, to help it manage such things as bone fragments and skin for grafting (see University of Michigan Health System Tags Surgical Tissue). The system is designed to control which personnel retrieve tissue products for surgical procedures, as well as record which patient receives each product. For items requiring refrigeration, the system also monitors the length of time they remain out of cold storage. The system leverages Texas Instruments 13.56 MHz high-frequency (HF) passive RFID tags complying with the ISO 15693 standard, attached to the bottom of the cardboard box or plastic bag containing the tissue specimens. Mobile Aspects software, running on a server housed within the hospital, contains the unique RFID number encoded to each item's tag, and associates that number with the product's serial and lot numbers, description, expiration date, temperature requirements and other data. Now, UHMS is installing Mobile Aspects RFID-enabled cabinets for use in the operating room at the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital.

Confidex Supplies Contactless Tickets to Atlanta Transit Authority
Finnish tag manufacturer Confidex has announced that it is supplying the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) with its limited-use contactless tickets. MARTA averages 200,000 passengers each day, and operates a network of bus routes linked to a rapid-transit system consisting of 48 miles (77 kilometers) of rail track with 38 train stations. The deal leverages Confidex's ISO 14443-A based Breeze Tickets, which can be printed and personalized according to an individual customer's requirements. The delivery format can be either single-cut (as in the case of MARTA) or reel or fan-folded, according to Confidex. "The transition process went smoothly," said Davis Allen, MARTA's assistant GM of finance and CFO, in a prepared statement, "and Confidex continues to provide attentive, timely and thorough customer service in our day-to-day operations. We look forward to our continued partnership." Since August 2009, Confidex has served as the transit authority's sole supplier of contactless tickets.

TazTag Intros New TazCard Contactless Portable Device With Built-in ZigBee
TazTag, which specializes in contactless solutions leveraging Near Field Communication (NFC) and ZigBee standards, has announced that it now has a multi-application contactless device with a ZigBee communication link built in. The TazCard is a special-purpose, Java-based computer, approximately the size of a credit card, that features a 3.5-inch color touch screen, biometric authentication, audio output, data storage and a tamper-resistant secure element, and that offers USB and 6lowPAN communications (6lowPAN is an IETF standard for IPv6 over low-power wireless networks), in addition to NFC functionality. The ZigBee functionality has been implemented in the current TazCard product using Atmel's new fully integrated ZigBee single-chip, the AT86RF231 2.4 GHz low-power transceiver. In January 2010, TazTag announced it had partnered with Inside Contactless to integrate Inside Contactless' MicroRead NFC chip into TazTag's TazCard, an NFC electronic wallet (e-wallet) and platform for developing e-wallet applications (such as ticketing, payment, loyalty and more), and TazKiosk, an interactive NFC kiosk for use with the TazCard (see Inside Contactless and TazTag Partner on NFC Apps). The TazCard is available now with a software development kit (SDK) based on Java, according to Eric Fouchard, TazTag's CEO. The card and SDK, designed for integrators and solution providers, cost €1,000 to €3,000 ($1,370 to $4,100), with an additional TazCard for €500 ($684). "The mass-production target price is less than €150," Fouchard says, adding that TazTag is working with partners that are developing vertical solutions for different markets worldwide. Specifically, he cites the retail sector in the United States, the health-care market in Canada and applications for indoor geo-localization and museums in Europe. "All of them will use ZigBee (or 6LowPAN Stack) associated to NFC," he adds. Fouchard says his company plans to announce a new product in April of this year, noting, "We will provide a complete ecosystem for NFC and ZigBee applications, compliant with your next NFC-enabled phone."

Melexis, Proxima RF Team Up on RFID Sensor Kit
Melexis a maker of advanced mixed signal semiconductors, sensor ICs and programmable sensor IC systems, and Proxima RF, a provider of high-frequency (HF) reader solutions, have partnered on an RFID sensor kit (DVK90129) designed for use in such applications as cold-chain management, industrial data loggers or medical monitoring devices. The RFID sensor kit comprises an evaluation

board featuring the MLX90129 (a contactless sensing system on a chip that includes a versatile sensor interface, an internal temperature sensor, data storage memory and an ISO 15693 RFID tag front end) and the plug-and-play Proxima RF desktop reader (FCC-certified). "For many years, we focused on providing RFID turnkey solutions for high-end applications, like readers for anti-counterfeiting and modules for handheld computers," said Terry Rachwalski, Proxima RF's VP of business development, in a prepared statement. "The Melexis Sensor Tag IC embeds the majority of the requested features and functions used in cold-chain monitoring applications. With the RFID sensor kit, we will enable integrators to quickly develop and propose effective solutions for temperature monitoring to the supply chain actors." The DVK90129 is available now through both Melexis' and Proxima RF's sales channels.

Sirit, RF Controls Offer RTLS for EPC Gen 2 Tags

RFID provider Sirit has announced it is working with RF Controls, a St. Louis-based RFID company that has developed an RFID system able to pinpoint passive ultrahigh-frequency (UHF) tags in three-dimensional space. The duo has integrated Sirit's INfinity 510 (IN510) UHF EPC Gen 2 interrogator and RF Controls' innovative bidirectional electronically steerable phased array (BESPA) antenna technology (see RFID 2.0). The system will help users automatically identify, locate and track items on a zonal basis, using passive UHF RFID tags compliant with the ISO 18000-6C and EPCglobal UHF EPC Gen 2 standards. According to the two companies, RF Controls' BESPA antenna technology, combined with the IN510 reader, results in a system designed to achieve exceptionally long operating range for passive UHF RFID tags and accurate locationing of the tags in three dimensions. An implementation comprises one or more Signal Acquisition and Source Location (SASL) "smart antenna" modules, each of which contains a Sirit IN510 reader. SASLs are connected by Ethernet to an edge server that aggregates and collates data. Each SASL can accurately determine a tag's location in three dimensions, with an accuracy of 1 foot. This, according to Sirit and RF Controls, is achieved by making use of high-integrity RF signal information that is generated from the unique characteristics within Sirit's IN510 interrogator. "This exciting strategic partnership with RF Controls has led to groundbreaking advancements with real-time locationing systems," said Bruce Roesner, Sirit's CTO, in a prepared statement. "The high performance of the IN510 operating in conjunction with RF Controls' novel antenna array allows for location and tracking RFID tags over an extremely large area with precision never before envisioned."