

In Pursuit of Excellence

RFID technology offers the potential to achieve sustained operational excellence, for those companies willing to take chances.

By Mark Roberti

Feb. 2, 2004—The response to the premiere issue of *RFID Journal's* print magazine has been extraordinary. We've had so many people call and request additional copies that we are now almost out of all the extra magazines we printed for people who subscribed after the initial mailing and for distributing at events. An executive from a major toy manufacturer wrote: "My boss took my copy and I'm not sure I'll ever see it again. Can you send another four copies?"

A senior executive at one of the world's largest consumer products manufacturers wrote to say he'd just read the issue from cover to cover. "You did an outstanding job of capturing the issues," his e-mail said. "The problem I see that you have now is that you have set the bar so high, how are you going to keep up with this benchmark that you have established for future issues?"

Good question. Excellence is hard to achieve, but it's even harder to sustain. Striving to meet the challenge is part of what makes life wonderful and what makes being in business so exciting. I've always been passionate about publishing, and I'm passionate about RFID because it offers new and better ways to handle a million different everyday tasks, from routing airline baggage to tracking cases of shampoo moving from a distribution center to a store.

But achieving excellence in the supply chain is every bit as difficult as achieving it in publishing. I've been stressing the need to roll up your sleeves and get master files in order, to launch small pilots and learn, to—in short—get your hands dirty with RFID technology. I still think that's the right approach. But I've also realized it's not enough. Companies need to take risks. Not daring, bet-the-company risks, but small, calculated risks that could lead to big benefits if they work, and only small setbacks if they don't.

Here's the issue. If you launch a small pilot and all you do is replace the bar code with an RFID tag, the small savings you get from not having to scan the tags within your four walls will be offset by the cost of the system. To achieve real benefits, you have to rethink the way you do things, change your processes, give line of business managers the authority to try new things. That involves risk. Some projects may not pay off. But if senior executives don't encourage a spirit of innovation and risk-taking, RFID technology is going to provide only limited benefits.

When the Internet emerged as a powerful new medium, it was a handful of startups that saw the potential to do business in radically new ways. Gradually, established "brick-and-mortar" companies caught on. But most still haven't even begun to tap the Internet's potential. A handful of companies have taken chances and found impressive new ways of doing old tasks. IBM runs several factories making hard drive heads remotely over the Internet from San Diego. Disney is coordinating the construction of a new theme park in Hong Kong remotely over the Internet. Many companies could use the same technology but prefer to do things the safe, comfortable old way.

So how is *RFID Journal* going to live up to the high standards we've set with the first issue? We're going to continue to take chances. We're going to continue to invest in hiring the best designers, best writers and best editors. And we're going to continue to infuse our print magazine, Web site and events with the passion we have for achieving excellence. I hope we can inspire you to seek new opportunities, to strive for excellence, to find better ways of doing things and not to yield to those who would rather not change.

Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article, click on the link below.

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