

# Yantra Adds RFID Link

To help its customers meet Wal-Mart's mandate, Yantra will add RFID-enabling middleware to its supply chain software.

By Jonathan Collins

Feb. 4, 2004—Yantra says it will have RFID support built into its supply chain applications by the end of the quarter. The initial goal of the enhancements is to help the company's customers meet Wal-Mart's RFID mandate requiring suppliers to put RFID tags carrying Electronic Product Codes (EPCs) on pallets and cases beginning in January 2005.

"Release version 7x of our business process platform is due in March, and it will have a built-in infrastructure component to deal with RFID middleware," says Robert Sweeny, vice president of product management at Yantra, which is based in Tewksbury, Mass.

Yantra describes its platform as the only complete set of applications for what it calls "synchronized fulfillment management," which the company defines as managing the flow of orders, inventory and shipments both inside and outside an organization. Those applications include order and fulfillment management, inventory synchronization, and logistics, warehouse and product management. The new RFID components will use third-party middleware to let Yantra's applications connect to RFID readers and tags. The company says it will turn to partnerships with RFID middleware specialists including Connecterra and OATSystems to enable Yantra customers to link its applications with RFID deployments. The company says it will gradually introduce additional RFID support to its Yantra 7x platform.

"Our initial RFID features will be Wal-Mart EPC shipping compliance, warehouse and store receipt portals, warehouse shipment confirmation portals," says Sweeny. During the next six to 12 months, the company says it will integrate RFID support more deeply within its supply chain application software.

"Our roadmap includes adding warehouse and store replenishment portals, RFID-enabled cycle counting, RFID-enabled returns and management, RFID serial number and warranty management," says Sweeny, who believes that for many retailers, the need to deploy RFID in their supply chain remains more than a year away. "Customers are very interested in RFID—they know it is coming and they want to make sure we are prepared for it—but they are at least 18 months away from projects to really integrate RFID into their operations."

Yantra customers include Sysco Foods, which uses Yantra's platform to manage its distribution network; DHL and FedEx, which use it for their third-party logistics operations; and technology retailer Best Buy. The majority of them, Sweeny believes, are largely stepping back and waiting to see the results of other companies' deployments.

"Most companies are looking to Wal-Mart for thought leadership. Deployment will wait until there is proven success in deploying and operating RFID," says Sweeney, who maintains that, contrary to Wal-Mart's expectations, there is little evidence yet that the largest retailers will gain clear benefits from RFID deployment. "Market leaders already have high-level efficiencies in the supply chain and most WMS customers have 98 percent inventory accuracy."

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