

# MWVIS Bets on Item-Level Tracking

MeadWestvaco Intelligent Systems, a wholly owned subsidiary of MeadWestvaco, is marketing hardware, software and services designed for tracking unique items in stores.

By Mark Roberti

Apr. 14, 2004—Many industry analysts are saying retailers won't use RFID to track unique items for many years. Don't tell that to Elizabeth Strong, general manager of [MeadWestvaco Intelligent Systems](#), a Laurel, M.D.-based subsidiary of forestry company MeadWestvaco. MWVIS has developed an RFID solution consisting of hardware, software and services, and it's focusing most of its efforts on tracking individual items in a retail environment.

"There is tremendous demand, so our biggest challenge is staying focused," Strong says. "There's a lot of interest in how our technology can be used in the supply chain. Our item-level approach addresses the needs for source tagging as well as item, and case and pallet association, which is key to tracking throughout the supply chain."

Strong took over at the end of January as GM of MWVIS from Ronnie Hise, who has taken on a strategic role: overseeing the development of an RFID strategy that can be applied across all MeadWestvaco units. Under Hise, MWVIS was launched as a startup within the forestry company. It developed networking technology that enables one reader to control hundreds of reader antennas by having them read tags in sequence (most readers can use no more than eight antennas to read tags). The technology has been tested at a Tesco store in the U.K. (see [Tesco Tests Low-Cost RFID System](#)) and in a CVS pharmacy in the U.S.

The technology is part of a product suite that includes services (MWVIS will assess a customer's needs), hardware (shelf design, reader configuration) and software (the application collects RFID tag data and aggregates it so it can be passed on to enterprise systems).

"We are working with a number of tag and reader suppliers in both 13.56 and UHF and will continue to do so to ensure that we bring the best technologies to our customers," Strong says. MWVIS hosts the application on a remote server for its customers, but can also install it on the customers' premises if customers prefer that option.

Strong believes that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's recent endorsement of RFID for combating counterfeiting of pharmaceutical drugs (see [FDA Endorses RFID Technology](#)) will accelerate the pace of adoption of RFID at the item level. "Given the focus on consumer safety in the pharmaceutical supply chain, we see a much higher level of interest [in item-level tracking], which signals that the adoption rate will speed up significantly," she says.

The FDA has suggested that 13.56 MHz technology is most appropriate for item-level tracking. The MWVIS solution uses 13.56 MHz. Strong says that high frequency is superior to ultra-high frequency at the item level because UHF radio waves are absorbed by water and are more easily reflected by metal than HF waves.

"We have proven the capabilities of 13.56 MHz technology," Strong says. "Stores have implemented our

technology and are using it to track inventory at the item level. But we are also doing trials with UHF tags. We are essentially frequency agnostic."

Strong says she is seeing a great deal of interest from apparel makers and even companies that make wines and spirits. MWVIS will customize its solution to meet the needs of companies in a variety of industries, not just pharmaceuticals.

"We are developing the product roadmap based on real-world problems and building solutions to those problems," she says. "We believe the real value is in tracking the item from the manufacturer into the retail store and to the consumer."

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