

**Solution providers need to help end users develop trust in the technology.**

By Mark Roberti

Oct. 24, 2011—Many sellers of radio frequency identification technology have told me they would like to meet the CEOs of major companies. They believe that if they could just reach the top executives and explain the magnificent benefits that their solutions offer, those CEOs would see that value and write checks for whatever amount the systems might cost. But the reality is that a CEO is the last person to whom vendors should be talking. Why? Because they have no credibility with CEOs.

I know this, because I talk to a lot of RFID project leaders at end-user companies. Many CEOs are very skeptical of RFID, and of RFID projects, and demand to see hard evidence that the technology can deliver real value—and with good reason. Sometimes, even when presented with such proof, they still refuse to believe it.



This is one reason that RFID adoption is taking longer than many predicted, though it's a phenomenon not unique to radio frequency identification; rather, it's true of any new technology. Potential buyers are rightly skeptical, since they have heard so many claims that never pan out. So RFID companies and project leaders need to build credibility with senior executives.

During the [Strategic RFID Workshop](#) that I presented at last week's [RFID Journal LIVE! Europe 2011](#) conference and exhibition, I advocated that companies take an enterprise-wide approach to RFID—that is, that they build a companywide infrastructure able to support their firm's strategic objective. But I noted that this approach should be implemented incrementally, rather than all at once.

If someone approaches a CEO and says, "Here's my grand vision for an enterprise-wide RFID system that will enable us to reduce costs and boost efficiencies while enhancing our core strategic objectives—all I need is \$5 million," that person will not likely get very far. Instead, companies need to have a vision of how RFID would be used enterprise-wide, but start with small projects that can deliver real value.

Such an initial success would encourage the CEO to fund a second project—and three or four successes might convince that executive that the technology works. Eventually, rather than fighting for funding, the RFID project leader would be inundated with requests from business managers for solutions to their problems. I know that this is how it works, because I have heard the same story from one end-user company after another, including almost all of those recognized as leading adopters of the technology.

Vendors need to first build credibility with project leaders, by delivering a solution that will work. Then,

they can begin building credibility within their organization. In my view, RFID vendors would do better to forget about trying to sell their systems to CEOs, and instead focus on being a partner that supports RFID project leaders attempting to build credibility within organizations. An RFID company that acts as an adviser, as well as a solutions provider, will have the most success.

Some RFID companies understand this. A few years ago, I had a meeting with a senior executive who had just taken over responsibility for his firm's RFID business. He told me, "I'm very impressed with what *RFID Journal* has done. You've built tremendous credibility with your readership, because you're honest about what RFID can and can't do. I want our company to have the same credibility in this market."

That company knows not to oversell RFID—and it's doing very well as a result.

*Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article, click on the link below. To read more of Mark's opinions, visit the [RFID Journal Blog](#), the [Editor's Note archive](#) or [RFID Connect](#).*