

HP Debuts RFID Services

Hewlett-Packard launches three services to guide companies throughout the RFID implementation process, from learning how the technology works to maximizing a return on investment.

By Jonathan Collins

May 10, 2004—Hewlett-Packard, the IT and computer products and services giant based in Palo Alto, Calif., has unveiled its first packaged RFID services. To provide those offerings, the company plans to leverage what it has learned while deploying its own RFID systems to tag HP products, as well as use the experience it has gained from helping a number of companies, including toy and games manufacturer Hasbro and fire-log company Conros, to deploy RFID technology to comply with Wal-Mart's requirement that its top suppliers tag shipments starting in 2005.

"We want to take the hype away and show what RFID can do for an organization so that companies can develop their own vision," says Salil Pradhan, chief technologist for HP's RFID program.

The three new services aim to help steer companies through the entire process, first by providing an educational program for companies with no RFID experience, then by managing initial pilot deployments and finally by helping to integrate its customers' RFID systems with their existing enterprise IT systems.

At the lowest level, HP's new RFID Discovery Service will bring customers to an HP RFID center—currently in Palo Alto and Taiwan, with Singapore, Geneva and the U.K. to follow—as well as to HP's own facilities where RFID has been deployed. By giving its customers the opportunity to witness the technology in action at these centers and facilities, HP believes that its customers will discover ways that RFID can benefit their own operations.

The second offering, HP's RFID Adaptive Starter Kit, is aimed at companies that want to proceed with a pilot RFID deployment. The Starter Kit will include a selection of suitable tags and readers, as well as middleware that can be customized to each pilot deployment, and HP will also provide guidance and training for the pilot.

"There are multiple physical issues that arise when building an RFID system that we can bring our experience to solve," says Pradhan. The company says pricing will be according to the size of the pilot and that that could be any size a customer wishes—from a single portal to a whole warehouse.

HP's final offering, the company says, is really the key to any RFID deployment, and is also where HP feels it has an advantage over the many other companies offering RFID pilot and systems integration services. HP's RFID Readiness Assessment and Roadmap Planning service will help customers develop and implement ways to connect the RFID deployments to their existing IT systems. "RFID is not just about deploying tags and readers. It is about transforming a business and integrating that RFID network into existing IT systems," says Pradhan

As part of that service, HP will use its own Agility Metrics methodology to examine how a company can adapt its existing operations to get the most business benefit of any RFID deployment. The offering is an extension of the Adaptive Enterprise strategy that HP launched in May 2003 for helping its customers to

better use IT to become more efficient. “We have done this for ourselves, and so we can help our customers plan their own roadmaps for RFID adoption,” says Pradhan

HP says it will work with a number of RFID hardware and middleware vendors in order to select products that are most appropriate for each individual deployment. Further out, HP says, it will likely develop its own middleware and other software with RFID capabilities to add to its central OpenView suite of business management software. Pradhan says that as HP builds up more experience deploying RFID systems across a range of companies and industries, it may develop packaged offerings aimed at specific industry vertical markets.

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