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Battling the Status Quo

I typed the word “innovation” into the search engine at Fortune.com, and found 3,238 articles and videos. Forbes.com doesn't display the number of articles returned by a search query, but I found page after page of articles with such titles as “Innovation Beyond Apple,” “The Way to Innovate to Beat Radical Discontinuity” and “The Healing Power of Innovation.” And when I surf CNBC and Fox Business News, those

sites are always lauding innovative companies.

But according to the books I've been reading to understand why the adoption of radio frequency identification is taking longer than many expected, innovation isn't appreciated within most organizations. The books suggest the adoption problem lies not with RFID technology, but with resistance to change.



Mike Shiff of RFID Recruiters suggested I read Geoffrey Moore's *Inside the Tornado*, the follow-up to his bestseller, *Crossing the Chasm*, which explained how new technologies go from being adopted by a handful of technology enthusiasts to becoming mainstream. *Inside the Tornado*, published in 1995, outlined the business strategies technology companies need to embrace in order to survive the pre-adoption phase for their technology, and then how to take advantage of the hyper-growth phase.

What struck me was Moore's explanation of the status quo, and why it's the biggest obstacle to adoption of any new technology. For all of the lip service given to innovation, most companies are wedded to the status quo, and don't want to change until they have to. This makes sense. CEOs don't know the issues that front-line workers face in managing inventory, and if they do, it's not their biggest concern; CIOs want to protect their networks and avoid change; and CFOs never want to spend money on new technology.

So the only way a new technology gets adopted at a company is when there is either a high-level technology enthusiast

willing to take a risk, or someone with a compelling need lobbies for change. For this person, the status quo is not acceptable, because too many assets get lost, operations aren't performed as effectively as they should be or whatever. This rings true to me, because these are *RFID Journal's* readers. I hear from people every day who have a compelling need for RFID. And their battle is to encourage their companies to invest in a new technology enabling them to be more efficient. I can't tell you how many people have told me, "We've developed a great application for RFID. The ROI is there. It would solve a lot of our problems—but we can't get funding."

This person and the RFID vendor should be natural allies, because the end user wants to buy an RFID system and the vendor wants to sell one. But too often, vendors focus on the features of their technology, or the weaknesses of their competitors' products, instead of on giving this person the information he or she needs to sell the idea of adopting an RFID system to solve the problem internally. In the end, the vendors raise questions in this person's mind instead of answering them, and that undermines the end user's ability to affect organizational change.

If vendors would take a different approach and focus on helping this person, they could achieve a small win within a big company. Then, the person with the compelling problem that is solved could help the vendor break into other departments. With a couple of successes under its belt, the vendor could then go to the C-suite and make a pitch for deploying the solution on a larger scale. This end user would become a reference account that would encourage others with the same problem to adopt. And once enough people in an industry adopted, the status quo would shift and everyone would begin to adopt. And then they'd be in the "tornado."

Another problem is that vendors aren't willing to build complete solutions for a single industry or type of user,

which Moore says is essential. End users complain to me that they see a generic RFID solution, and then have to spend a lot of money to have it customized to do what they want it to do. This increases the risk, which plays into the hands of those favoring the status quo. "We can't buy this and then invest a lot of money in customizing it," they say. "What if it doesn't work?"

Moore offers a lot of great advice in *Inside the Tornado*. But I would say most RFID vendors are not doing the things he recommends, which is too bad. As RFID Recruiters' Shiff wrote in a recent e-mail, "[Moore] is the real deal. I'm convinced his model offers as clear a path to the future as an RFID provider could ask for. The faster the RFID providers adopt his guidance, the better."

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 or click here.



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