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Easing RFID Deployments

Many prognosticators thought that the adoption of radio frequency identification would happen quickly because Wal-Mart would require suppliers to increasingly tag more items in the retail/consumer packaged goods supply chain, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration would require pharmaceutical companies to track shipments in the drug supply chain. That hasn't happened, so adoption will need to be driven by sound

economics—that is, companies will use RFID where they can get benefits.

To help companies achieve short-term benefits, many vendors have been focused on delivering hardware, software and services that simplify implementations and lower the cost. Hardware vendors have been developing new interrogator form factors, such as mobile readers that can be put on a cart, enabling a clothing retailer or library to use one or two readers to cover an entire store. Forklift interrogators let a company read pallet tags without having to install a reader and antennas at every dock door. New, wearable readers let workers encode and apply tags when they pick cases.



By bringing down the up-front costs that end users have to make in RFID systems, vendors hope to jump-start adoption.

On the software side, more vendors are enabling companies to deploy systems cost-effectively. Working with Kimberly-Clark, OATSystems devised a simplified version of its software that could run on a laptop in a facility with no Internet access or even electric power. The system allows K-C to encode tags remotely and interrogate them to confirm they were applied to

the items (see “Kimberly-Clark Gets an Early Win”).

Still other companies are introducing managed services, where they install and maintain interrogators and run the network that filters the data. These managed services enable companies, or groups of supply chain partners, to get a complete RFID network installed quickly and without a large up-front capital investment.

By bringing down the up-front costs that end users have to make in RFID systems, vendors hope to jump-start adoption. As more success stories are published, more end-user companies are likely to take advantage of these options.



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