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Expectations for RFID Journal LIVE! 2013

Each spring, *RFID Journal* hosts RFID Journal LIVE!, the world's largest radio frequency identification conference and exhibition. The event is something of a barometer of the current state of the RFID industry. I usually write a column afterward to put into perspective what the event's mood and

activities suggest regarding the state of the industry. This year, I'm going to say what I expect beforehand, and we'll see if I am right.

Attendance at this year's conference will be up for the first time since the financial collapse, which indicates that the RFID industry is gaining momentum. While many company budgets are still tight, increased attendance suggests that a growing number of people see RFID as a potential solution to some business issues they face. I also believe attendees will be more committed to investing in an RFID solution than in the past.



A little historical perspective might be in order before I explain why I say this. During the mid-2000s, when Walmart put RFID on every businessperson's radar, a lot of people came to our events to see what the technology was all about. A lot left feeling RFID was not a solution mature enough for their business (in those days, for example, you couldn't get an ultrahigh-frequency tag to work on metal objects).

As time went on, fewer people came just to learn about the technology, and after the 2008 financial collapse, most companies that attended the event had a clear idea of the business issues they wanted to solve using RFID. Exhibitors would tell me, "There were fewer tire-kickers here, which is a good thing."

I think two things have been changing during the past couple of years that should come into focus this year. The first is that some companies are deploying RFID across the enterprise. So instead of looking at RFID to track a few thousand tools or

containers, companies are now investing in much larger systems.

We will, for example, have a panel session from the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Co. (EADS), the group that includes Airbus, Astrium, Cassidian and Eurocopter. During that session, Carlo Nizam, Airbus' head of value chain visibility and RFID, will put up a slide showing the growth in projects within the group during the past few years. I don't want to steal his thunder, but adoption is clearly accelerating at EADS.

I think other early adopters are in the same situation. They are going to LIVE! 2013 because they are expanding rollouts to new facilities or introducing new applications. They are serious about investing, and I expect the dollar value of contracts signed post-event will be significantly larger than anything the industry has seen to date.

There will, of course, be a lot of people at the event who have not yet invested in an RFID system. But unlike previous years, they are not looking at deploying RFID a few years down the road. They are coming to invest in solutions that can solve their business problems in the near-term. A recent survey of *RFID Journal* readers shows that the amount of time between first exploring RFID and investing in a solution is shrinking, as the technology has matured. These companies are serious about deploying RFID, and will likely invest in the technology within the year.

I have spoken to some of these attendees by phone as part of our Concierge program (to help attendees get more out of the event, we offered free consultations with an editor). A gentleman from a very large Canadian oil services firm told me that he had a specific project in mind. "We'd like to have this deployed by the end of the year," he stated.

I think these trends are part of the natural evolution of RFID

from a relatively new technology that only worked in some situations to a more mature solution that can solve many business issues and work in many situations. I believe the industry is really starting to find its feet. I expect growth to be steady during the next few years, and to then really start to accelerate.

I'll let you know next week if the event lives up to my expectations.

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.



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