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Great Products Need Strong Marketing

In 2000, when I was still a reporter for *The Industry Standard*, the dot.com bible, I covered many startups that focused on using the Internet to transform the global supply chain. Here is how things worked back then:

1. MIT graduate student has an idea for creating an online marketplace for, say, assorted fasteners used during manufacturing.
2. Student pitches business plan to venture capitalist (VC) on Sand Hill Road, in San Francisco.
3. Tough-minded VC grills student about how the venture will make money.
4. Student says, "We haven't figured that out yet."
5. Venture capitalist says, "We are giving you only \$50 million."
6. Student hires PR company.
7. PR company invites me to lunch at New York City's 21 Club, and spins me on how this online fasteners marketplace will transform global manufacturing.

Fast-forward to today. Here is how things now work in the RFID industry:

1. Engineer with many years of knowledge making RF products, realizes he (sorry but it's almost always a he) can make a better low-, high- or ultrahigh-frequency interrogator, reader antenna or some other piece of hardware.
2. Engineer borrows money from relatives, quits job and launches company.
3. Engineer invests in making a really nice piece of RFID hardware.
4. Engineer runs out of money and visits a venture capitalist.
5. VC grills him and offers a small sum of money, or none at all.
6. Engineer cuts costs, takes a second mortgage on his house and pours the funding into product development.
7. Relying on word of mouth, engineer either wins a few customers or sells his product to a larger company.



Many of you reading this will conclude that the big difference between 2000 and 2012 is that VCs are not throwing money at RFID startups the way they once did for Internet startups. This is true, but the real problem is that technology companies do not know how to market their products, and don't think it's important to hire someone who does.

I have been aware of this problem for several years, but it really hit home recently while I was putting together a product showcase for our upcoming RFID Journal LIVE! 2013 conference and exhibition, which will be held in Orlando, Fla., from Apr. 30 to May 2. The showcase is designed to help attendees view the many different products available at the event, and to quickly identify the exhibitors that have the products they seek. We asked exhibitors to send us a high-resolution photo of one of their products, so we could print it on a three-foot by three-foot panel, along with their logo and booth number.

It was shocking how few companies had good, high-resolution photos of their products available to send out. I realize that a great deal of marketing is conducted via the Internet, where low-resolution photos suffice, but product brochures and other print materials require high-quality, high-res photos—and those marketing tools are essential for communicating the benefits of a new RFID product. Fortunately, we eventually received solid images of more than 100 products that will be exhibited at the event, representing a wide array of categories, including portals, handhelds, embedded and USB readers, tags of every frequency, software applications and sensors.

I believe the product showcase will help attendees and our exhibitors, especially those that are less sophisticated marketers. And I hope that as the market picks up, solution providers will hire marketing professionals to let the world know they've built an RFID-enabled mousetrap.

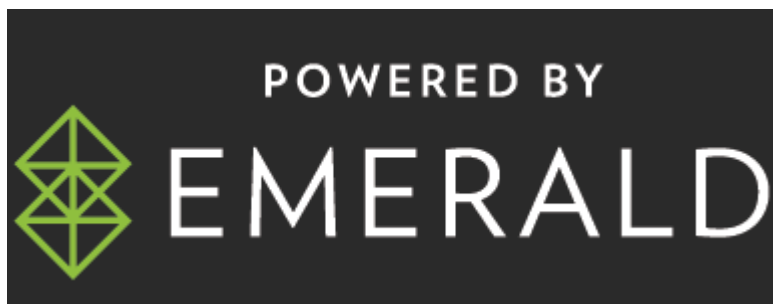
Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article, click on the link below. To read more of Mark's opinions, visit the RFID Journal Blog, the Editor's Note archive or RFID Connect.



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