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In Recognition of Excellence

Happy St. Patrick's Day, folks. As someone who is half-Irish (my mother hails from Gurteen, in County Sligo), I can say with some confidence that you have to be lucky to succeed in business. But you also have to work hard and have a smart strategy and good partners. Our three end-user RFID Journal Award winners—and many of the other companies that submitted entries—certainly fit that description.

Airbus won the award for Best RFID Implementation, narrowly edging out the U.S. Department of Defense's AIT Office and Metro Group. Airbus wasn't trying to solve a specific business problem; rather, what gave the company an edge was its three-phase, enterprise-wide approach to using RFID to streamline business processes across its value chain.



Why deploy RFID across the entire value chain, from suppliers to airline customers, instead of focusing on internal benefits? Here's how Airbus put it in its award submission: "The reason for the value chain approach is Airbus sees the value chain as 'profits in motion.' These profits are not limited to any particular function but are spread all along [the value chain]; the same is true of costs. So we are focusing on the big picture in order to achieve big savings. A holistic and integrated approach is, therefore, the key to ensure end-to-end interoperability, not just within Airbus, but within the Airbus ecosystem as a whole, and to avoid a scattershot approach and instead focus on the top priorities of our customers—both internal and external."

The submission summarizes some of the benefits achieved in phase one, which focuses on supply-chain tracking, warehouse logistics and distribution. Since 2006, Airbus has saved millions of euros each year by cutting process cycle times, eliminating paperwork and reducing inventory. In phase two, Airbus will focus on global transportation (land, sea and air), manufacturing and assembly operations, while phase three will tackle in-service operations and maintenance.

The award for the Best Use of RFID to Enhance a Service goes to Agence Métropolitaine de Transport (AMT), which finished just ahead of Handleman Co., a distributor and merchandiser of DVDs. Handleman is using RFID to improve the replenishment process and increase sales for its customers.

The AMT provides daily bus service to 750,000 Montreal residents, and wanted to encourage the public to use buses rather than private vehicles, by making travel more convenient and comfortable. Increased use of the AMT would reduce bridge and road congestion, cut green house gasses and pollution, and make Montreal an even better place to live. The RFID system was designed to provide real-time information to bus riders, allow supervisors to react quickly to accidents, traffic jams and other obstacles that disrupt service, and enable detailed cumulative reports to improve the management of routes and personnel.

With the RFID system installed at two terminals to date, managers have gained real-time visibility into the arrival and departure times of buses. If a bus is arriving late to the terminal, a manager can put another vehicle into service, delivering more reliable transportation to the public. The AMT is considering creating bus-only lanes and having the RFID transponder on the bus interact with stoplights, thereby making traffic for the vehicles move more quickly.

The competition for the Most Innovative Use of RFID also was intense. Interface Flor, the world's largest producer of commercial carpet tiles, finished ahead of two impressive entries. WiWait, a startup, has developed a system enabling customers to order and pay for coffee or fast food remotely, and to have items waiting when they enter the store. And Northrop Grumman is using RF sensors to measure shock to composite airplane parts and alert employees when a part receives an impact above a threshold that might cause damage.

Interface Flor, the winner, developed a method for embedding RFID sensors in carpet tiles, creating the world's first

multi-functional intelligent floor. The RFID-enabled Intelligent Floor system provides daily information on when and where maintenance has been done. With additional embedded sensors, temperature and moisture in a room or building can be measured, providing feedback on building health. The floor system also enables robotic maintenance by providing tracking and localization, which can increase efficiency, lower labor cost and decrease chemical consumption.

These pioneering companies deserve recognition, and you can learn from their experiences. Each award winner will offer a presentation during the April 18 award seminar at RFID Journal LIVE! 2008, to be held in Las Vegas. Attendees will learn how these firms developed their projects, the obstacles they had to overcome and the benefits they're now achieving.

In addition, we have also announced 10 finalists for our first Best in Show award (see RFID Journal Announces Winners of Second Annual RFID Journal Awards). The 10 technology providers were chosen from among some 40 entries. Each will provide presentations on the LIVE! exhibit floor, and judges will select the best new product exhibited at the event. The winner will be announced shortly thereafter.

Choosing a winner won't be easy, as the quality of these new products is very impressive. Bill Hardgrave, director of the RFID Research Center at the University of Arkansas, and one of the five judges, said: "Some of the technologies entered for this year's Best In Show award are truly game-changing and will allow us to do things heretofore impossible with RFID technology."

I congratulate the three award winners and the 10 finalists. They are all very deserving, and I look forward to seeing their presentations at LIVE! I hope you'll join us in Las Vegas as well—the awards will be one highlight in a very special event.

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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