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Living With Disruption

This week, my company, Emerald Expositions, made the decision to postpone RFID Journal LIVE! 2020 until Sept. 9-11 (see RFID Journal LIVE! Postponed Until September 2020). This has created numerous challenges: moving existing hotel reservations to the new dates, moving exhibitors into a new hall, dealing with equipment already shipped to the venue and so on. However, it was necessary in order to protect the

health and welfare of our attendees and exhibitors.

As we work diligently to complete this process as soon as possible for our attendees and exhibitors, I am well aware that we are not alone in facing business disruption from the spread of the coronavirus, COVID-19. Sporting events and concerts are being canceled. People are no longer gathering in bars and restaurants. And many shopping malls are mostly empty.



Businesses will be dealing with disruption from the coronavirus for many months into the future, possibly for more than a year. Suppliers have not been able to produce goods in China and Italy due to the lockdown in those countries, and production in many other nations has been affected as well.

How quickly companies recover will depend on knowing where existing parts and inventory is located in the system. Are items in inventory, have they been shipped and have they been stored in a warehouse? Obviously, a supply chain visibility technology, such as radio frequency identification, can help companies to determine where products are along the supply chain quickly and easily, and to thus make adjustments as needed.

It's difficult for most companies to imagine having visibility into the location of every part, parts bin, tool and finished inventory item. However, it's not only possible, but a few companies have already done so. A couple of years ago, I was at an event with Carlo Nizam, who was, at the time, Airbus's head of value chain visibility and RFID. He pulled out his laptop, logged into his corporate VPN and called up a digital

twin of one of Airbus's factories.

Within that virtual factory, Carlo could watch items moving in real time. He could see jigs and subassemblies and the locations of shipments that had been delivered. He could click on shipments to find out whether they had been delivered on time or late. And he could pull up reports showing parts scheduled to be delivered and their present locations.

Fear of a global contagion is not a reason to deploy RFID or other Internet of Things (IoT) technologies. You should do that for all the other benefits you can achieve—lower costs, more responsiveness to customers, more efficient use of labor and so on. But I'm pretty sure companies that have deployed RFID for those reasons are happy they have the technology now, as it can help them deal with disruptions to their supply chain.

Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal.



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