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Managing Growth

There's a type of RFID software you may need in the near future, if you're not using it now. It goes by a variety of names—let's call it "visibility" software. You may not be familiar with it if your RFID system was deployed to solve a single problem and you manage RFID data with middleware, a turnkey software package designed for a specific application, or software embedded in handheld readers.

Visibility software comes into play when you add more RFID applications to your RFID infrastructure. You may, for example, want to use the same RFID readers in a factory to track your own tools and raw materials arriving from a supply-chain partner. Or, perhaps you want to expand an asset-tracking application to facilities in other parts of the country or the world.



Visibility software can act as a layer between middleware (or the readers themselves, if you're not using middleware) and your back-end applications. Or, it can sit adjacent to your back-end systems. Your back-end software typically handles transaction-oriented business processes, such as enterprise resource planning (ERP) and order management. These applications are all about the flow of money or legal obligation. Visibility software, on the other hand, is about the flow of physical things or people—whatever it is you're tagging and tracking. It provides a central place to store this information, so it can be used for many business purposes.

Visibility software can produce reports about the flow and locations of tagged assets, as well as issue alerts when it detects deviations from the norm. It can provide a detailed history of where things have been. Visibility software also can interoperate with business applications when the flow of money and the flow of physical goods intersect. For example, an ERP system can tell a visibility software application what goods are expected in a shipment, and the visibility software

can confirm their receipt to the ERP system when the tags on the goods are read.

There are many varieties of visibility software, including custom and packaged products. The big enterprise software players—Axway, Oracle, SAP—each offer one. Many smaller software companies, typically with “track” or “trace” in their name, offer visibility software tailored to specific business use cases. Open-source software, such as Fosstrak, is another option, and some end users build their own visibility software.

When you’re ready to evaluate visibility software, be sure its data model includes the “what,” “when,” “where” and “why” of each tag read, so business applications know what happened without knowing how the RFID readers collected the data. A product that complies with the Electronic Product Code Information Services (EPCIS) standard will provide this. The EPCIS standard also will ensure interoperability between different vendors’ components and futureproof your deployment as technology changes over time.

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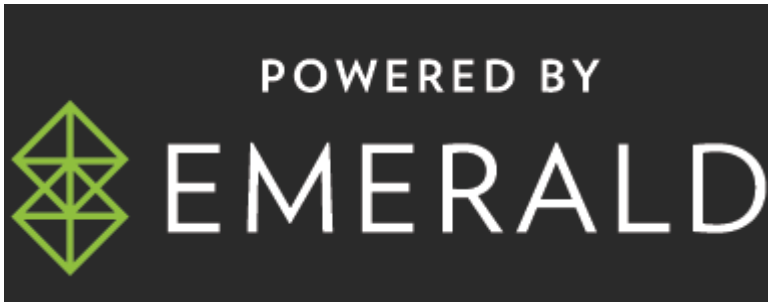


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