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## Pieces of the Puzzle

Sept. 16, 2002 – When I first started covering radio frequency identification 18 months ago, the Auto-ID Center had an idea for creating a low-cost system for tracking goods globally. But many pieces of the puzzle were still missing. No established vendors were stepping up to make low-cost readers. And even fewer software companies were designing software that could take data from readers, process it and pass it along in

a useable format enterprise software systems.

Gradually, however, the pieces of the puzzle are coming together. Not by magic, but by the pull of the emerging market. Earlier this month, SAMSys Technologies, a maker of multi-frequency readers, announced that it had joined the Auto-ID Center. Our sources tell us that NCR is working on a point-of-sale device that reads both bar codes and electronic product codes. And Symbol Technologies is working on a handheld reader with similar capabilities.

SAP joined the Auto-ID Center more than a year ago and has been working with BiosGroup to develop intelligent agents that will act automatically on data from readers. We did a big feature on BiosGroup because we believe that agent technology is going to be critical if RFID ever becomes ubiquitous.

But long before that happens, there is going to be a critical need for technology that processes data from readers and passes it on to today's software systems. And in the space of four days, we wound up covering three such systems. Accenture demonstrated its "silent commerce" infrastructure at SAP's Sapphire conference in Lisbon. Matrics introduced a new Visibility Manager along with its line of tags and readers. And Athena Integration unveiled a software platform designed to automate an auto assembly plant.

None of these systems are designed specifically to work with the technology the Auto-ID Center is developing. But they are important because they show that companies are beginning to address all facets of RFID tracking. Companies looking to deploy the technology have an increasing number of options, which is important if the market is ever going to take off.

We continue to believe that the Auto-ID Center represents the best chance of creating a global, low-cost system. I spoke at

the recent LabelExpo in Chicago. Three established vendors stood up and dismissed the Auto-ID Center's efforts. What's strange about that is not that all three companies are sponsors of the center. What's odd is hearing three companies selling RFID technology tell an audience about all the potential problems with the type of product they sell.

The reason for this unusual behavior, of course, is that the establish vendors know that if the center succeeds, their existing proprietary technology will be obsolete. We understand that creating a global system for tracking goods with low-cost chip is fraught with problems. But we have examined both the claims of those who support the Auto-ID Center and those that oppose it. In Part 2 of our Special Report *Low-Cost RFID: The Way Forward, Prospects for Adoption*, we spell out not just why think the center will succeed, but how and when companies will roll out the technology. Prospects for Adoption may just be the most important thing we've every published.

*Mark Roberti is the Editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article or submit your own, send e-mail to [mroberti@rfidjournal.com](mailto:mroberti@rfidjournal.com).*



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