RAIN Survey Measures the Gap in RFID and Sustainability Approaches

- **RAIN Alliance report finds that corporations have work**

to do to leverage their RFID solutions to boost sustainability efforts.

- **The alliance plans to offer education and support as key to help companies use their technology to meet UN sustainability goals.**

UHF RAIN RFID use can help many companies achieve sustainability goals, but a disconnect between sustainability departments, and the RFID teams, means that few are taking advantage of that fact.

That is the conclusion of a the RAIN Alliance's "Bridging the Gap, Connecting Corporate Sustainability with RAIN RFID" report released this month. The report focused on the role RFID is, and is not, playing at helping companies achieve their sustainability markers.

The document includes the results of a 20-company survey– all participants were users of RFID technology–to understand how they leverage the technology for sustainability.

RFID Maturity Determines Sustainability Efforts

The findings indicate that the longer companies use RFID to track inventory or assets, the more likely they are to include the resulting data in their sustainability objectives. Based on survey results, said Aileen Ryan, RAIN Alliance CEO, the potential for RFID technology to support sustainability use cases is compelling but will require more education, industry wide. The alliance says it intends to take a leadership role in providing some of the education needed to bridge RFID systems and sustainability efforts.

Ryan noted 80 percent of companies that had used RFID for more than five years created a link between their RFID and sustainability teams. That percentage dropped to 18 among companies that had used the technology for less than three years.

The RAIN Alliance's Sustainability Working Group launched the "Bridging the Gap" study to begin making the case to technology end users how RFID can support sustainability goals. In fact, among the United Nation's 17 sustainable development goals, the working group finds that RFID can impact five of those goals. They are:

- Boosting good health and wellbeing;
- Affordable clean energy;
- Industry innovations and infrastructure;
- Sustainable cities; and
- Responsible consumption and production.

Additionally, the survey found a wide variety of use cases for RFID that helps address sustainability challenges including reducing waste, anticipating the lifespan of a product, enhancing decision making and collecting environmental data related to CO2 reduction.

RAIN Alliance Present Results at RFID Journal LIVE!

Beontag's Barbara Dunin, director of ESG, marketing and communications, detailed the report highlights at RFID Journal LIVE! with standards organization AIM Global. Dunin described RFID as a data carrier for both business benefits—around inventory management and supply chain efficiency—and sustainability.

The benefits for using RFID to reduce carbon impact are numerous, the workgroup found. One example is using RFID tag reads to optimize safety stock levels, resulting in less waste, and a more efficient supply chain to reduce excess carbon emissions.

Altogether the survey consisted of 150 participants from 20 companies who are RFID experts, industry players, and end users of RFID. The majority were apparel companies, but included were automotive, healthcare, manufacturing food and

beauty products makers as well. The companies hailed from Europe, Latin America, U.S. and Asia.

“It was important to gain a global sense, of sustainability efforts and RAIN RFID’s role.” Dunin said.

Traceability and Inventory Management Lead the Way

Half of those surveyed had already been using RFID for five years or more. When all participants were asked what type of sustainability data they are collecting with the technology, the majority said they were collecting none. Instead, supply chain traceability and inventory management are their goals.

That’s the case even though RFID technology enables data capture that can help measure sustainability levels as well as to improve those levels through greater supply chain efficiency. “To have a more accurate carbon footprint, they could use RFID. But they are not doing that,” Dunin said.

However, introducing sustainability measurements into the RFID ecosystem may not require a large amount of changes or expansion to the existing system.

“In some cases, they don’t need to collect new data but understand the data they are already capturing,” she said.

Identifying the Sustainability Benefits of RFID

To begin formalizing the sustainability and supply chain efficiency efforts, companies should include collaboration between business units or departments within the company as opposed to siloed approaches, wrote the authors of the report. Companies would benefit from cross industry partnerships, as well as fostering collaborative industry initiatives to identify sustainability opportunities, the report indicated.

The study recommended exploring new business models for sustainability such as improving reusability of products or making use of energy and water more efficient.

Additionally, companies can identify key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor and measure the results. Ultimately companies should access training resources, Dunin added, which the RAIN Alliance seeks to provide via webinars, industry reports and white papers.

Creating a Strategy to Merge RFID and Sustainability

One of the first steps to bridging the RFID and sustainability gap is engaging company leadership. By working collaboratively, a company's departments can define a unified strategy, then prioritize the first and subsequent steps. Companies can learn from successful models, and seek an education expert, Dunin said, while she added that starting with a pilot is useful to adjust the path ahead.

"When we are working with inventory management data this can be an action to unleash new business models based on circularity and use the data to track and improve forecasting to reduce over production and waste in the supply chain," said Dunin.

Dunin added that traceability is almost synonymous with sustainability. Asset tracking can ensure that tools and equipment are used to their full capacity, and supply chain traceability can measure a product's footprint.

"We think we are living at a very interesting moment to help companies achieve their sustainability goals," she said. "How can we speed up this process? As an industry we should be the guardians of this message, understand our customers, and the customers of our customers. It's dependent on us to make this happen."

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