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RFID: Still Innovative After All These Years

If you're like me, you're probably more than a little overwhelmed by what is going on in the world and by the non-stop coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. The coronavirus has emerged as the most urgent issue currently facing mankind, and it's all anyone is talking about. At RFID Journal, in fact,

many of our recent articles, by necessity, have been connected in some way to the outbreak. Warfare, violent crimes, terrorism, pollution and other major concerns all seem to be on the downswing as the pandemic has taken center-stage and forced most people (though regrettably not all) to safely shelter indoors while efforts to stem the spread and develop a vaccine continue.

Radio frequency identification will be useful in helping society come to grips with the new norm post-pandemic. The technology will be facilitative for countries, companies and healthcare organizations looking to protect the masses and ensure that those infected receive the proper treatment they need. Even now, innovative new uses of RFID are being conceived of to help deal with the crisis. This is hardly surprising, as the technology has long been a source of innovation in the healthcare field.



In 2017, university researchers studied a way to use RFID signals to measure human or animal health, including heart rate, blood pressure and other vital signs, without a physician having to touch an individual (Cornell University Researchers Seek Partners for RFID Vital Signs Device). MS Queensland Youngcare employs RFID to enable wheelchair-bound residents to enter and leave units and public areas hands-free (RFID Opens the Door for Residents at Multiple Sclerosis Housing Facility). And ElectroCore developed an RFID-based method of controlling the dispensing of vagus nerve stimulation treatment to relieve pain for those suffering from cluster headaches or migraines (RFID Controls Headache Pain Treatment).

But it's not just medical issues that RFID can address. RFID Journal has been covering the technology since 2002, demonstrating time and again, both in our articles and at our online and face-to-face events, how beneficial it can be for a range of sectors, including retail, transportation, logistics,

supply chain, defense, manufacturing, aerospace, packaging, sports, entertainment, libraries, and more. But it's useful for a variety of other applications as well, including some you might not have thought about.

RFID's use in tracking household pets is well-documented, as is its effectiveness at monitoring cattle herds. But it's not just dogs, cats, cows and sheep that the technology can keep an eye on. The Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, for instance, equipped its penguins with RFID tags and installed readers at swimming pools in order to determine how much time the aquatic birds spend in the water, then correlated that data with the presence of lesions growing on the animals' feet (RFID Helps Link Penguin Swimming Rates to Bumblefoot Infections).

RFID has also helped with the tracking of reindeer in Finland. Three years ago, herders tested a solution from Anicare that provides location data as the animals graze and migrate through the country's forests, preventing the loss of livestock from reindeer wandering away or stopping in place (Startup Provides NB-IoT Reindeer Ear Tag for Real-Time Location). The following year, herders tested a LoRaWAN solution from Digita and Actility on dozens of alpha female reindeer, as part of a plan to track thousands of animals and detect when they may be in danger from predators or vehicles (IoT Aims to Track Free-Ranging Reindeer).

Moreover, the technology has made it easier for people to enjoy themselves at public events and entertainment venues. For example, museum collections—such as those at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Smithsonian Libraries—have used an NFC-enabled “brain box,” containing 3D-printed models and picture postcards of artifacts, to trigger recorded descriptions, commentary or music, and to record new sounds dedicated to particular artifacts (Dozens Piloting NFC-Driven Museum in a Box).

EPC Solutions Taiwan built a system to automate dice-throw reads at casinos, with an RFID reader built into a throwing machine, six UHF RFID tags in each die, and custom near-field antennas that can read the tags with great precision (RFID Brings Precision to Dice Rolls). And at Finland's Santa Claus Office, St. Nick's elves give RFID tags to visiting boys and girls, who can then wear them so Santa will know who's been naughty or nice (Ho, Ho, Ho, Santa Uses RFID).

Meanwhile, the organizers of South Africa's Dusi Canoe Marathon successfully assessed the safety and speed of racers during a rigorous race by using RFID tags affixed to kayaks and stand-up paddle boards, with readers positioned along the course. The system ensured that the organizers would know if someone required assistance, while providing information to friends and family members so they could meet up with participants along the course and bring them food and water (RFID Navigates South African Rivers in Kayak Marathon).

In addition, RFID has made it easier for people to enjoy one of the world's most popular beverages: beer. PourMyBeer integrated readers and tags with its self-serve taps, tables and wall-mounted fixtures so customers could help themselves at bars and restaurants, such as the Brewers' Tasting Room (RFID Users Help Themselves With Beer Server). An RFID-based system from iPourIt enables a California bar to allow patrons to pour their own beer and receive special offers via a Web-based server (iPourIt Serves Up 'Enhanced Customer Service' for Beer Drinkers), while a 12-tap beer wall at Lynn Street Market lets shoppers pour their own drinks by tapping an RFID card against the wall's readers (RFID Pours Beer at Shopping Market).

Oak & Stone, where 25 percent of its sales go to beer, implemented an RFID-based self-serve wall that records what demographics prefer which brands and beverage types, as well as when they tend to buy them (RFID Brews Up Valuable Beer Data for Restaurant). Pacific PourHouse also launched an RFID

self-serve wall, which not only has put beer-pouring in the hands of customers, but also feeds intelligence about drinking habits to management, helping them stock the most popular beverages (Understanding Beer Drinkers, One RFID-Enabled Pour at a Time).

The point is, RFID isn't just about counting items in a warehouse, on store shelves, in parts bins or throughout hospital wards, and it's not just useful for tracking patients, medications and high-value equipment during medical emergencies like pandemics. It's a versatile technology that can be put to use in an endless number of ways, limited only by an individual's or company's imagination.

If your business has implemented RFID or a related Internet of Things-based technology, such as Near Field Communication or Bluetooth Low Energy, in a unique manner—or if an organization has utilized your company's RFID solutions uniquely—be sure to drop us a line and tell us about it. If we think our readership would find it interesting, we'll be happy to cover it. In the meantime, please stay safe and healthy.

Rich Handley has been the managing editor of RFID Journal since 2005. Rich has authored, edited or contributed to numerous books about pop culture and is also the editor of Eaglemoss's Star Trek Graphic Novel Collection.



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