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SAMSys CEO Offers Read On RFID

Oct. 7, 2002 – Cliff Horwitz, chairman and CEO of SAMSys Technologies, a Toronto company that manufactures a broad array of RFID readers, is irked by the Auto-ID Center's claim that it will help create an RFID reader that costs about \$100. He recently spoke to RFID Journal Editor Mark Roberti about

that claim, the need for standards and the growth of the industry. Here are excerpts of their conversation:

RFID Journal: SAMSys recently joined the Auto-ID Center, which wants to help create a \$100 RFID reader. Do you support that goal?

Horwitz: We are very much of a part of the school of thought that believes in doing everything possible to diminish the cost of readers. However, RFID is not a “generic” technology. By definition, therefore, there is no single reader design that one can use to base a blanket statement regarding readers. There is a broad recognition that reader costs need to come down. It will happen organically.

RFID Journal: So there’s little vendors like SAMSys can do to bring down reader costs?

Horwitz: We are dealing with a technology that is evolving. There is no single cataclysmic event that is suddenly going to change the nature of RFID to the extent to what can’t be embraced today will be embraced tomorrow. There is nothing to be gained by further misinforming the end-user community that costs are suddenly going to drop significantly. Both the so-called low-cost reader and the 5-cent tag are probable milestones at some point in the future. But right now the industry needs end-users to embrace what is available and apply it to the applications that can be addressed cost effectively today.

RFID Journal: Isn’t it clear the market wants global standards and low-cost tags and readers?

Horwitz: To the extent that that is what the end user community is telling us they want, it is incumbent upon us to

give it to them. But one doesn't have to impose a standard that says this is a \$250 reader. The reader will be what the reader needs to be for any given environment. Whether it is a portal installation that requires six antenna or a conveyor belt application with one antenna and different power level and forklift truck reader that is completely different, you don't do anyone any favors by saying an RFID reader is going to cost \$250 because it isn't. It all depends on what it is. It's like saying motor cars won't take off until they get to \$5,000.

RFID Journal: The car was around for a long time before Ford built one people could afford.

Horwitz: Yes, but even as Ford built his car, Rolls Royce was making cars that cost many times more than Ford's. Yes, there is a need for a low-cost reader that will provide a certain level of functionality. But there will also be a need for other form factors that are going to be more highly functional and more high-powered. Similarly, one tag won't solve all problems. This is not a vanilla technology, and any attempt to make it one only serves to confuse buyers and further delay the adoption of the technology.

RFID Journal: We have a variety of standards initiatives today, such as ISO, GTag and the Auto-ID Center's electronic product code. How do you see them playing out?

Horwitz: What you are going to see is that there will be multiple standards and they will evolve in vertical markets or applications. There will not be one global standard. Look at ISO18000-6, where already you have a type A and a Type B. Surely that tells the world that a single technology is not going to suffice for all applications. What you will end up with is probably a series of five or six different standards

that will cover the full spectrum of needs. They will provide the analgesic for the pain that the end user is looking to remove in making the investment decision.

RFID Journal: How long will it take for these five or six standards to emerge?

Horwitz: I would certainly hope that it is not going to take as much as another year because there is a reticence on the part of the end users to commit themselves until this situation is clarified.

RFID Journal: As you said, RFID is not a vanilla technology; every implementation is different. Is there enough expertise in deploying these systems?

Horwitz: The answer, in a nutshell, is absolutely, unequivocally no. That is why we have started a very aggressive VAR program, which has at its core an element of training, because if we wait for this to happen through osmosis, it isn't going to happen. It is critical because you can't just bolt black boxes onto walls. If you are talking about operator-free, high-speed, open system environments, there aren't more than a handful of companies capable of installing those types of systems.

RFID Journal: How hard will it be to bring people up to speed?

Horwitz: The problem with RFID is you don't have absolute replication of performance from one dock door to the next. And one problem is that there isn't the kind of survey equipment or analytical equipment needed to enable the lay person to identify exactly what's going on. That's why we developed a tag evaluation module, which we have patented. Clearly, we are not suddenly going to find ourselves as an industry populated

by a group of trained and skilled engineers in what is very clearly a black art.



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