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Startup Gears Up Marketing Effort

Sept. 10, 2002 – Matrics, a startup based in Columbia, Maryland, has introduced a line of RFID tags, readers and software designed to create a “people-free” wireless environment for tracking products and assets. The company has also launched a program to line up partners who can help it

deliver complete solutions for customers.

The Matrics product line consists of passive UHF tags that operate in the 902-928 MHz range. They feature a unique double dipole antenna, so they can be read regardless of orientation from up to 20 feet. The read-only chips in the transponders are just 750 microns square, which is one reason they are among the least expensive on the market – about 50 cents in volumes of one million or more.

Matrics is offering several versions of its smart label inlays. A 1D medium strip is approximately six inches long by three-quarters of an inch wide. 2D labels come either two inches square or four inches square.

The company sells one industrial-strength reader that can accommodate a fixed reader antenna, a shelf antenna and a smaller antenna for specific applications. The readers cost from \$1,000 to just under \$2,000 depending on the number of units purchased. It is just 12.5 inches wide by 8.75 inches high by 1.5 inches deep, so it can be easily mounted in a portal. Matrics plans to unveil a handheld reader at the Frontline show in Chicago later this month.

The company has also introduced a new middleware appliance product, called the Matrics Visibility Manager, which can handle the vast amount of data coming from RFID readers. The Visibility Manager is a PC server that buffers, cleans, and filters data coming from the readers. Users can configure it to pass along only supply chain event data to enterprise software applications. Since the architecture includes an open XML interface, it works with any system and is easy to integrate.

Matrics has been offering evaluation kits that include smart labels, a reader with four antennas, basic reader software and the visibility appliance, for \$6,000 to \$9,000, depending on the configuration and features the prospective customer wants.

Matrics CEO Piyush Sodha says the company has done 12 pilots for companies that he can't name because of non-disclosure agreements. But the company hasn't signed any customers yet, and one reason may be that the company is a startup. Sodha is launching the "Force Matrics" partner program in part to address that concern.

The first aim was sign up partners with specific vertical industry expertise. "If there is a specific solution for warehouse management, hospitals, or baggage tracking, we wanted to get the best-in-class experts who could take the technology and turn it into a solution," says Sodha. "We are a visibility platform enabled by RFID. We need to work with partners who can turn that platform into something that can deliver a return on investment."

Matrics is also working with resellers overseas, because many international companies prefer to buy through established channels. And the company is looking to line up manufacturing partners that can help it deliver millions of tags and thousands of readers, as well as technology partners that can provide add-on technologies that Matrics can't afford to develop itself, such as readers for niche applications.

"Our feeling is that only when we achieve some critical mass in each of those areas will people feel they are doing business not with a lone ranger but with a community," Sodha says.

Some of the first members of the Force Matrics program include Accu-Sort Systems, VeriCode Systems, and WhereNet.



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