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Visibility Down to the Item

Companies are moving toward item-level tagging far more quickly than most industry experts ever expected. It was assumed that tagging items would be too expensive for years to come. In some cases, that's still true. But numerous studies and some early pilots have shown that the benefits of tagging at the item level are significant, and the business case is compelling today for some products, such as DVDs, high-end

apparel and prescription drugs.

Our cover story, RFID Gets Item-ized, describes some of the many item-level projects currently under way and explains why there has been a sudden increase in interest in item-level tagging. And for companies wondering if they can tag items profitably today, it also provides insights into where and when it makes sense to tag at the item level.



Two companies that think item-level tagging makes sense right now are drug manufacturer Purdue Pharma and wholesaler H.D. Smith. They ran a groundbreaking pilot that showed RFID could be used to track the chain of custody and authenticate drugs (see “E-Pedigree Pioneers”).

Item-level tagging will provide ultimate visibility into your inventory. Even if you don’t plan on tagging unique items for several years, it’s time to start thinking about upgrading your warehouse management system to handle RFID data. When is the right time to upgrade? What upgrade options are available? And what are the challenges that have to be overcome? Warehouse Management Systems That Handle RFID Data provides the answers.

Of course, RFID can be used to track individual people, as well as individual items. Mining the Benefits of RFID looks at how companies in the often-dangerous mining and energy sectors are using RFID to locate employees to ensure their safety. These two industries are also using RFID to track assets and

products in transit.

Before item-level tagging takes off, RFID systems and the related infrastructure need to mature. The network infrastructure has to be secure to prevent counterfeiting (see *Winning the Toughest Battle*), privacy and security issues must be addressed by a Generation 3 protocol (see *The History of EPC's Future*) and data-sharing standards must be developed to deal with what happens to tagged parts after they are put into cars, airplanes and other products (see *The 95 Percent Solution*).

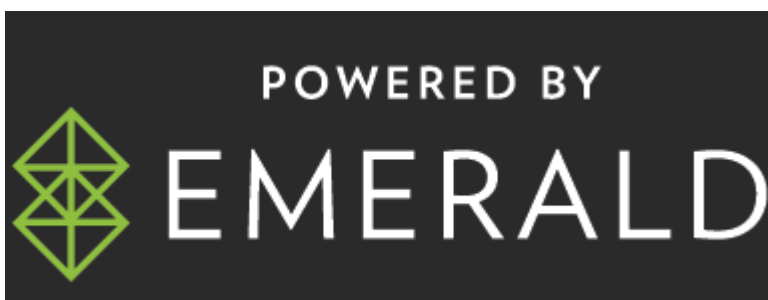
These are pretty significant obstacles-as significant as driving the price of tags to a level where they can be put on everything. But people no longer think Brock's vision of a world in which all items have RFID tags linked to the Internet is crazy. Many are working hard to make it a reality.



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