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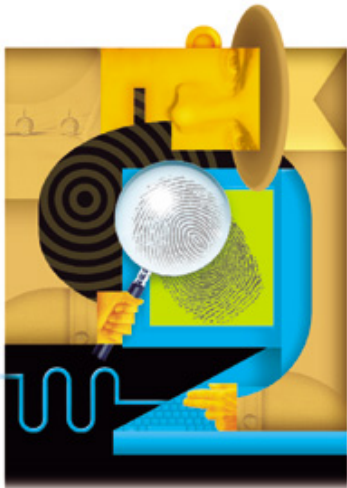
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Will the Empire Strike Back?

A one-sided story in the May issue of the respected U.S. magazine *Consumer Reports* led to a flurry of negative articles in the media. Then, several state legislators put forth bills restricting the use of RFID.

The bills pose little threat to companies deploying RFID systems, but the negative publicity they generate does. And

since more companies are looking to deploy RFID at the item level—where the tagged item would end up in a consumer's hands—there is a growing feeling among leaders in the RFID community that it might be time to counter the negative reports.



RFID vendors and end users are weathering the storm of negative news articles and commentaries.

(Illustration by William Rieser)

EPCglobal, the nonprofit organization in charge of creating Electronic Product Code standards, and AIM Global, the trade association for automatic identification technology and service providers, have been active in responding to legislation proposed in the United States. Representatives of both organizations have testified at legislative committee and government agency hearings. But EPCglobal made a conscious decision not to speak about after-sales applications of EPC technologies, such as using the tags for recycling, for fear of raising privacy concerns.

Most companies and organizations closely associated with EPC technologies have created RFID privacy guidelines for their

company and members. But many companies now feel that they should take a more proactive approach and highlight RFID technology's many potential consumer benefits.

Some retailers are considering doing pilots that involve item-level tracking in the food sector. They want to see if they can use RFID to gather the data needed to comply with the U.S. Bioterrorism Act of 2002. Such pilots could show consumers that RFID can be used in a positive way to protect the food supply.

Some pharmaceutical companies believe a major e-pedigree trial could raise awareness of the technology's benefits to safeguard drugs. But there are concerns that such a trial would highlight the problem of counterfeiting.

While the RFID community debates the issue of how proactive to be in promoting RFID's consumer benefits, it's unlikely there will be any industrywide attempt to portray RFID technology in a positive light, at least until real consumer applications are in the marketplace. For the foreseeable future, RFID vendors and end users will have to weather the storm of negative news articles and commentaries on their own.



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