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THE LATEST IN LIVE

HOW COVID CHANGED THE TRAJECTORY OF THE RFID INDUSTRY

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RFID technology isn't new. Other contactless solutions such as mobile ticketing, mobile ordering, mobile payments aren't new either. In fact, some events and venues have been using them for years with great success, solving challenges like ingress and ticket fraud, and creating new revenue opportunities. More and more organizations had begun to consider contactless options pre-pandemic, but the incremental costs, infrastructure requirements, and questions around adoption remained high barriers to entry for most.

Then a global pandemic happened and contactless solutions went from nice-to-have to must-have. If live events were going to come back, they had to find ways to get guests in, for them to transact, and to interact without touching anyone or anything. And that wasn't just the big guys. Contactless had to be accessible, adaptable, and affordable for events with fewer than 50 people and events with more than 50,000 people alike.

We sat down with some of the best in the contactless business to chat about how the pandemic affected their product development and weren't surprised to learn that for many of them, roadmaps were accelerated, some detoured, some branched out, and turned back, and others simply maintained their projected course. We asked them about their biggest hurdles, which project were a total fail, and how they view the industry in the immediate future.

Here's what we learned from our conversations with [WRSTBND](#), [Intellitix](#), [Connect&Go](#), [Patron Technology](#), and [Appetize](#):

Tell us about your company, the primary areas of contactless that your product covers, and where it is typically deployed.

CONWAY SOLOMON, CEO/CO-FOUNDER, WRSTBND: WRSTBND was officially founded in 2019, but we'd been working with the team and customers since 2015 as part of a New Orleans production company. We do ticketing, access control, cashless payments, and experiential via the traditional RFID chip on a wristband. We also offer a totally contactless solution for ticketing and access control via RFID and NFC technology in your Apple or Google Wallet. It's completely contactless, and with no need for wristbands and wristband fulfillment. It's eco-friendly and saves events money.



We have two categories of clients. The first is transient or temporary events, with a sweet spot of around 5-10,000 attendees. These include music festivals like Hogs for the Cause, a Celebration in the Oaks -- a holiday drive through light show -- and food festivals. The second category is permanent attractions such as beaches. We are handling all season and daily beach badges for Belmar Beach in NJ this summer with our self-service ticket purchase and subsequent contactless scan of QR code at point of entry, removing all cash and contact from the process.

MILAN MALIVUK, CSO, INTELLITIX: Since 2010, Intellitix has been the leading provider of RFID for the largest events in the world. We've serviced 400,000 guests at Tomorrowland, as well as beer festivals, conferences, Comic Con, esports, and all types of festivals, with our access control, cashless, and experiential RFID product. We acquired CrowdBlink in early 2020, with the intention of using it to build a light-weight solution for events of all sizes.



In general, Intellitix deployments work best at events with at least 10,000 attendees or where there is a lot at stake. It is an enterprise solution. CrowdBlink, however, has no minimum deployment and doesn't require hardware or people to deploy, making it a very, very low cost solution. Additionally, CrowdBlink offers a ticketing integration with the organizer as the merchant, giving event organizers better control of cash flow.

ANTHONY PALERMO, CO-FOUNDER, CONNECT&GO: At Connect&GO, our RFID solution focuses on the entry, payment, and engagement process within an experience. Our goal is to make entering, paying and playing so simple, it's invisible. We solve the problem of long lines at doors, at food and beverage and merch stands, and at sponsor activations by removing the friction at each place. We are RFID-media agnostic, meaning our tech works on a wristband or RFID on a phone.



You'll find us primarily at high-profile events such as the Olympic Village for Olympians, sponsor activations for the Super Bowl, and Formula 1 -- events that have the vision to create completely connected guest experiences. Additionally, we also cover smaller 5,000-10,000 person events such as food and music festivals. In 2017 we pivoted to more permanent installations within the leisure industry and began deploying Connect&GO at amusement parks, theme parks, and water parks. Pre-COVID about 70% of our business was in permanent installations.

JASON MASTRINE, VP, MUSIC & COMEDY, PATRON TECHNOLOGY: We have an integrated suite of event technology products and services, including ticketing, access control, mobile apps, cashless, and experiential solutions.



We support festivals, conventions, conferences, concerts, music and comedy venues, attractions, sports fan events, arts and theaters, and more. Our technology and team have powered New York Comic Con for many years. At this year's Super Bowl, we helped the NFL provide timed entry at their free, and very well-attended, fan event leading up to the game.

KEVIN ANDERSON, CSO, APPETIZE TECHNOLOGIES: We power food, beverage, and retail transactions for the world's highest volume businesses -- including sports and entertainment venues, theme parks, multi-unit restaurants, and travel and leisure companies -- through our fully cloud-based solutions, including ordering, payments, mobile ordering, and our mobile API. We offer a full-service, in-person installation model, but due to COVID, we were able to offer a successful self-installation strategy, specifically in more than 125 Urban Air Adventure Park locations throughout North America.



We cover all major industries, from sports and attractions to restaurants and theme parks. We partner with over 55% of major league sports teams, so you'll find us at landmark stadiums, like Fenway Park and Dodger Stadium, as well as Hale & Hearty restaurants, LA Zoo, Live Nation venues, Madison Square Garden, and more. We've proudly powered major events, from the 2018 Super Bowl to the 2020 World Series. The most recent event is Globe Life Field's home opener in April. The opening game welcomed back fans at near capacity, about 40,000, and we powered all the transactions for the event.

How have your contactless initiatives changed in the past year?

WRSTBND: Most of our products were already contactless, but what really shifted the most was the way contactless was looked at. Before the pandemic, a lot of our services were viewed as optional or nice to have, but now they are seen as required or necessary features. We have expanded some of our features to be more contactless than before, removing any remaining touchpoints as much as possible when you get on site.

We are really trying to think through what those processes and systems are going to look like at least for the next year or two. Overtime, the need for health checks will go away, but some of the

systems that were put in place because of COVID, like contactless, will stick around because they provide a better and easier experience for the customer.

INTELLITIX: We knew there was a need for a platform for small and medium-sized events and in January 2020 we acquired CrowdBlink as a way to challenge our enterprise solution, Intellitix. We decided not to deploy CrowdBlink in 2020, and instead we developed and focused on building a system that has the same benefits of Intellitix but without the deployment, infrastructure, and costs.

We quickly developed a COVID screening solution called CrowdBlink Protect and worked with all essential industries such as construction sites, child care centers, and schools. The pandemic validated a lot of the things we were already thinking before, but accelerated the changes.

CONNECT&GO: The leisure industry was able to open up before live events, and the restrictions around their reopening pushed us to add new features such as timed entry, virtual queueing, contactless payments, and mobile ordering and contactless pick up. Now, going into Year 2 of the pandemic, the properties that deployed these features are realizing that they have so much data and can use it to understand how the guests are interacting and what they are doing. They can map out the customer journey via the data they've collected. Because of this visibility, they don't want to go back to the way it was before.

As events return, we are seeing the festival industry asking what the leisure industry has been doing and how they can implement those best practices into their events.

PATRON: The past year has definitely emphasized the importance of contactless initiatives. We took advantage of the "relative quiet" we all experienced in 2020 to advance the integration of our suite of contactless products. The efficiencies of contactless are something we've always known were valuable so we are continuing to help our clients implement these types of solutions to power their event businesses.

APPETIZE: COVID certainly accelerated deployment as well as the roll out of some new features such as the integration of Location Aware QR codes in our Interact Web platform, providing unique location information with the scan. Location identifiers contained in the QR code can include a table number, parking space, or stadium seat number, for example. This lets the wait staff know where to deliver a customer's order and allows operators to track where orders are placed to analyze traffic flow

Additionally, our recently enhanced support allows large operators with complex menus to easily build and control menus across their organization. By allowing for greater item complexity, Appetize makes it easier to manage combos, prefix meals, and conversational ordering.

In general, we've been seeing a significant increase in contactless and Apple Pay and Google Pay transactions.



Were there any things your company considered or tried that absolutely fell flat?

WRSTBND: We were using more native mobile apps, but we learned that no one wants to download another app and instead have moved to using mobile web. We've also moved away from emails and instead are using more text messages to reach guests.

INTELLITIX: There was pressure early on to move towards mobile payments, but we've been trying to hold back, and wait for 5G networks to come out. We did some small pilots of it, but always fell flat with coverage before 5G networks. A stronger network was the trigger point to making it feasible.

CONNECT&GO: We tried to become a full restaurant POS. At some point we realized that we can't be great at everything and we didn't have enough resources. Plus, every event has its own way of doing things. It was challenging to build a product that answers all requests and demands of all clients and do it at scale.

PATRON: Like many companies during COVID, we naturally wanted to lend a hand, so we spent some energy looking at how our timed-entry tools could be utilized for testing and vaccination sites. Ultimately, we opted out after looking at HIPAA guidelines regarding the handling of sensitive, personal health information.

What's the biggest hurdle for contactless tech?

WRSTBND: The biggest hurdle is mental. It's still new. We have to get consumers and operators to want to make the shift to contactless sooner than they expected. But now is the right time even if it is a little uncomfortable. In a lot of cases, there will be smaller crowds this year which is a good time to test things. Plus, people will be so happy to be at events, they won't be as concerned about something being new and different.

INTELLITIX: Event organizers think that there are more hurdles than there really are. They often say, "I don't know if our demographic is ready for it. They aren't a tech-y crowd." What they don't understand is that when tech is executed well, it's simpler than not using tech. We never have those conversations in the second year.

CONNECT&GO: Pre-COVID people were more disillusioned with Big Brother, privacy, and tracking. Now they are more focused on convenience and opportunity, so that hurdle has somewhat dissipated. There still is a misconception that we can see where you are at any time and are always tracking you. It's not true. We're just asking to scan in and out of places.

PATRON: Some aspects of contactless technology are out of budget for event organizers, so it's important to be realistic about your budgets. The implementation of a traditional "cashless" solution is not trivial. Arguably, the better spend for small to medium-sized events might be our custom mobile app paired with native mobile ordering. You get many of the same benefits at a fraction of the cost.



Which areas are you most eager to improve or expand into?

WRSTBND: At the end of the day, we are trying to build a better, more engaging experience for consumers. We are more than just a ticketing company and our customers are more than just a ticket. I'm not a "GA Friday", I'm a real person. We want to build more engaging elements that don't look at the wristband as a ticket type, rather, as a profile with lots of things associated with it, such as a ticket, coupons, method of payment, etc. We are focused mostly on our core competency of access control now, but are building layers of features and products on top of it, to create a pyramid of services.

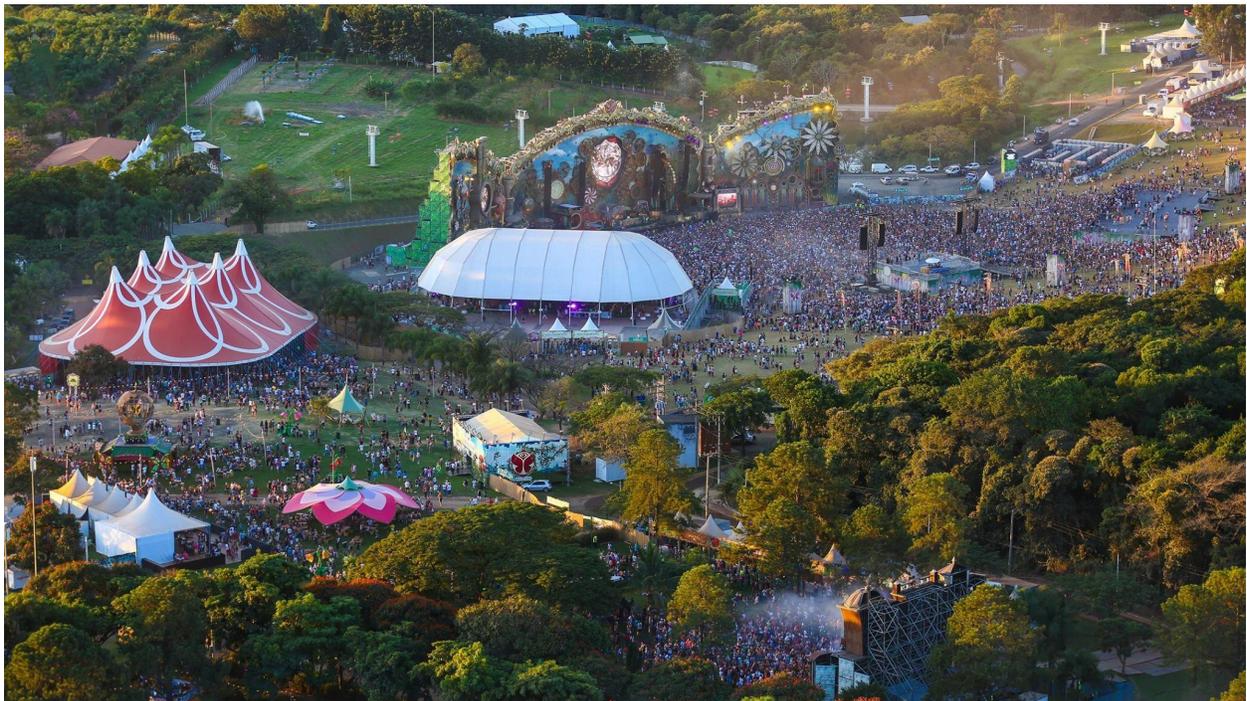
INTELLITIX: Right now, we're trying to focus on helping industry rebuild rather than expanding into new things. There is a lot of uncertainty around things opening, closing, events happening, not happening. Event organizers are being faced with all new costs and new things that have to be implemented in order to reopen amidst capacity restrictions, which means less revenue. There is a tipping point where events just can't happen. We are focused on taking our core competencies from large-scale events and using them to help all events in a cost-conscious manner. We need to get back to doing what we do.

PATRON: Most event producers will tell you that any time you have multiple companies handling your complex, event tech needs it's potentially a recipe for disaster. We're going to continue expanding our multi-product offering so event organizers don't have to deal with that.



APPETIZE: We're in the process of launching a payments platform, Appetize Payments, that makes it easier for businesses to move toward cloud and mobile ordering. The new product allows customers to bundle their payment gateway and processing solutions with Appetize software, reducing costs, friction, and support.

To wrap up, we asked each person what their ideal integration of their contactless technology looks like on the ground for users and resoundingly, they all said the same things: **seamless, frictionless, invisible**. Each of these companies is focused on building products that enhance the user and client experience, is well integrated across all facets of the event, and connects the full life cycle of the event, pre, during, and post.



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