

RFID: The Right Frequency for Government

The evolution and application of new technologies clearly has the capacity to improve the quality of life and increase standards of living. Radio frequency identification (RFID) is such an application that will have a substantial impact over the next two decades. The total RFID market has been forecast to grow almost exponentially. RFID's promise is rooted in one word: information. RFID is a small, inexpensive electronic tag that store a great deal of information. It, for example, can be attached to shipments of goods so that the contents can be read from a distance without opening the containers to find out what is inside them.

The integration of RFID technology with other forms of information technology makes a paradigm shift possible. RFID technology can track patient safety by error-proofing processes for medication, as well as providing global visibility of worldwide shipments, which will improve the flow of commerce and the security of nations. The future role of RFID will dramatically increase its impact over time.

The need to identify "things." Throughout history, there has been a need to identify things. By identifying things, we can sort, classify, request, ship, account for, and look for specific objects. However, the vast majority of things have remained identified by their class, category or type. RFID allows individual things to be uniquely identified.

While much of the focus of RFID has been on the many private sector initiatives, the public sector has been an extremely fruitful area of RFID activity in three very different, very prominent supply chains, as described in the following cases:

- **Department of Defense.** The largest supply chain RFID initiative to date is that of the Department of Defense. The U.S. military has been at the forefront for using active RFID tagging for containers of goods, vehicles and equipment. These efforts are part of an overall strategy to enhance visibility and control over the complex and far-flung supply operations necessary to support U.S. military global missions.
- **Food and Drug Administration.** Both the federal government and the states have issued mandates – or what are very close to mandates – to the pharmaceutical companies to begin using automatic identification technologies to better control the prescription drug supply chain. Due to the high monetary value of the product and the absolute need to ensure its integrity and authenticity, the pharmaceutical industry and regulators have both a business case and a security need to have better visibility in the drug supply chain.
- **Department of Agriculture.** With the national scope and rapid movement of animals and the animal food products through America – and the importance of the export markets to American agriculture – it is essential for animal health officials to be able to have rapid "trace-back" capability. Once the National Animal Identification System is fully implemented, all animals in select species will be identified – largely through RFID technology – and all facilities where such animals are located will be registered with the government. These records will allow animal health officials to isolate cases of animal diseases within 48 hours of their being reported.

Government's role in advancing RFID technology. Government can specifically focus on the following: conducting trials and early implementations, establishing common standards, encouraging research on the technology itself, sponsoring education on RFID, and minimize and resolve privacy concerns. ■

Resources

David C. Wyld. "[RFID: The Right Frequency for Government](#)" (IBM Center for the Business of Government) 2006.

Jacques Gansler and Robert Luby, [Transforming Government Supply Chain Management](#), Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2004.

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03.07.08 v.1

