RFID News that Matters, Week of April 20, 2009

A Better Looking RFID Portal? Washington State Passes Watered-down RFID Privacy Law; New Turnkey Retail Tracking System Sign of Market Maturity; More

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With product and application announcements continuing to come fast and furious, many covering arcane technical details, SCDigest sorts through the press release stack to identify the most interesting and noteworthy RFID news.

New Radiation Sensing System Shows Part of RFID Future: We were intrigued with the announcement from the companies Sicel Technologies and Gentag, who have partnered to develop a system that can detect radiation in shipping containers.

The patented technology is a combination of Sicel Technologies' medical radiation sensor technology and Gentag's wireless sensor platform. For this solution, one of several types of RFID tags is married with sensors that can detect radiation in a container. A unique cell-phone based application, along with an RFID reader add-on, enable the cell phone to interpret the signal coming from the container.

The press release says that depending on the antenna, tag and reader combination, the tags can be read from as many as 12 miles (really?) away. Instead of radiation sensors, the tags could instead be married to chemical sensors.

According to the joint press release, the system will have a low price point that will make it easily affordable to tag millions of containers with the system. This has obvious implications for efforts to improve global supply chain and port security. There is growing and we believe inevitable interest in combining RFID tags with sensors in dozens of potential supply chain applications, and the potential to tie these and other applications in to the ubiquitous cell phone could help RFID adoption really explode.

Many have commented over the past few years that the real barrier to adoption of many RFID-based solutions to solve supply chain problems was the lack of packaged software that could be easily deployed and take advantage of RFID's true capabilities.

New Retail Tracking Solution from Checkpoint Shows Improvement in RFID-Enabled Software: In the end with RFID, it's all about the software.

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We're seeing more and more RFID-centric software solutions being released to market, including a new offering from Checkpoint Systems called the "Merchandise Visibility Solution."

The solution leverages software capabilities Checkpoint gained when it acquired OATSystems last year, which today operates as a division of Checkpoint. The system is targeted to retailers and promises an "end to end" solution from supplier to retail shelf, including tags, readers and the tracking software application, plus implementation services.

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The growing availability of packaged, "turnkey' solutions shows the kind of growing market maturity that was key to bar code finally taking off in the 1990s. What is also intriguing here is that Checkpoint offers a "service bureau" that can deliver RFID tagged labels to vendors, as it has done with EAS (electronic article surveillance) tags for years.

Suppliers that are already performing bar code or EAS tagging at the item-level – such as those in the apparel industry and some other high value categories – would not have to change processes at all to switch to attaching RFID tags/labels, making the shift almost seamless for these types of suppliers.

Washington State Passes Modest RFID Privacy Law: As expected, Washington state passed an RFID privacy bill last week, signed by the governor into law, but it was much toned down from earlier proposals, and is unlikely to cause RFID vendors or users much in the way of problems.

With that bill's passage, two other, more onerous bills are being dropped by the legislature for now.

The bill as passed at its core makes it illegal for someone to surreptitiously read tags carried by a person or on his or her possessions. It prohibits the scanning of an RFID tag by anyone except the business or agency that issued that tag, with certain exceptions, such as a transaction initiated by the "tag holder," and inadvertent reads (as long as that information is not disclosed to others).

The bill seems acceptable to those in the RFID industry, who were worried such legislation could present large obstacles to adoption.

Earlier proposals had called for requiring a signature from the RFID tag holder indicating he or she was aware of the tag and approved of its use by the providing company or agency; another earlier provision would have required all RFID-tagged products to bear a universal, clear and conspicuous label— recognizable by the public—to indicate RFID technology is being utilized.

Does Your RFID Portal Need Some Fashion?

In addition, Washington Governor Christine Gregoire vetoed one section of the bill that would have required the state's attorney general to make annual recommendations to the legislature regarding any new "potentially invasive technologies," In a public statement, she claimed this section of the bill would have created a financial hardship to the state.

Prettying Up the RFID Portal: We also found interesting a new product announcement from Jamison Door's RFID Division that offers a more attractive RFID portal housing for those that want a less "industrial" look.

The company's Gnome series provides a more attractive housing that can be outfitted with many existing reader systems, or delivered with readers already installed. The product is targeted at businesses that "want something warm and welcoming that blends well with the décor of their store, office, data center or other professional location" says **Tim Buckley**, Manager of Jamison's Industrial Portals. The units use "aesthetically-pleasing" textured ABS covers, and are offered with either solid oak side trim in four finishes or a more industrial matte aluminum finish.