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[Will Smith](#), Editor

Today's RFID Update

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Editor's Note: Today's top story is a look at last week's RFID World conference that took place from Monday to Wednesday in Dallas, Texas. Leslie Downey covered the event, speaking with end-users, vendors, and the conference organizers. Leslie is a principal at [RFID Revolution LLC](#), a Washington, DC-based firm providing RFID marketplace consulting services. She and her associates provide a market-based perspective to vendors and end-users of RFID products and services on how to close the gap between a promising technology and a successful commercial solution.

The large annual technology trade show [CeBIT](#) opened today in Hanover, Germany. At the conference, Gerd Wolfram, managing director of IT for giant German retailer and RFID early adopter METRO, predicted that item-level tagging for all consumer products won't happen for another decade and a half.

Lastly, research firm In-Stat has [released](#) a report on the Chinese RFID tag market. The firm notes that China's ID card initiative is one of the world's largest RFID projects and will be the leading driver of Chinese demand for tags until 2008, when the tagging of retail items will surpass that of ID cards.

Upcoming Events



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- [RFID Journal LIVE!, Putting RFID to Work, May 1-3, Las Vegas \(site\)](#)
- [RFID Smart Labels USA 2006 from IDTechEx \(site\)](#)
- [3rd annual RFID World Asia * 26 - 28 April 2006 * Singapore \(site\)](#)

Products & Services

- [CDOTechDirect.com: RFID Solutions, Services, and Hardware \(site\)](#)
- [SimplyRFID.com: No nonsense DOD mandate solutions \(site\)](#)

Webinars

- [Omron One-Day Compliance Kit - Free Webinar \(site\)](#)

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- [Join the Talent Pool of RFID Professionals! \(site\)](#)

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- [AWID Gen 2 Certified Readers - \\$995 \(site\)](#)

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- [Repacorp Smart Labels: 100% readability guaranteed! \(site\)](#)
- [Lowry Smart Trac Labels: Depend on 100% Good Labels \(site\)](#)
- [Monarch RFID Labels: Guaranteed With 100% Refund! \(site\)](#)
- [Nashua Corporation: EPC RFID Label Transponders \(site\)](#)

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[March 27-30 in Boston. To save 15% use code: RFIDUPDATE](#)

RFID World Sees Technology Taking Root

By [Leslie Downey](#), RFID Revolution

"Uptake of RFID technology will be gradual, similar to growth of the Internet. There's no *it* moment," noted RFID World 2006 attendee Bill Wilkinson of American Packaging Corporation. "But," he added, "it's amazing the difference a year makes." Indeed, at the RFID World Conference and Exposition last week there were ample signs that RFID technology was taking root.

Attendance at this year's show was 3,500, 20 percent higher than 2005. At 200, the number of exhibitors was up 50 percent, with "more than 150 already re-signed for next year," according to Tim Downs, president of the conference's organizer Shorecliff Communications (recently acquired by CMP Media).

Attendees were not only more numerous, they were also better educated. "Whereas last year end-users were coming to learn, this year they're coming with projects in mind and looking for total solutions," observed Joe Sandoval, director of US distribution sales for Printronix. Added Justin Hotard, director of

product management-RFID for Symbol Technologies, "People are coming with larger deployments, and have a better sense of what they can and can't do."

Another difference: last year, the vast majority of end-user attendees were seeking to comply with mandates. This year, by contrast, exhibitors estimated that over half the attendees were proactively investigating ways in which RFID technology could improve enterprise productivity. This year's group was more focused on asset tracking than Wal-Mart compliance, and more interested in "within-the-four-walls" operational improvements than the supply chain.

Product and service vendors were there to respond to the diverse demand. Ekahau demonstrated its WiFi-based asset-locating solution to throngs of visitors, including hospital administrators seeking to cost-effectively track diagnostic and therapeutic units worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Ekahau and Symbol have collaborated to offer an inventory-locating solution for retail supply chains, as well as pharmaceutical, healthcare, government, and other industries. Symbol's MC9000 mobile computing RFID reader now incorporates Ekahau's software to enable companies to pinpoint the location of EPC RFID-tagged objects.

Another provider of real-time location systems (RTLS) for asset tracking is RF Code, who displayed solutions featuring its 303 and 433 MHz Mantis active tags and readers and TAVIS (Total Asset Visibility) software. The company's tags are recognized for their small size, low cost, and long battery life (ten+ years). Its software supports a wide range of AIDC devices, including passive RFID, mesh networks, bar code, and GPS. "We recently announced support for Symbol's XR400 Gen2 reader," said Tony Da Silva, vice president of sales.

At Sun Microsystems' RFID Test Center near the convention center, Comtrol demonstrated the power of its new, RFID-enabled EdgeWare controller to enable real-time, intelligent routing decisions in manufacturing environments. Sensor information can be fed to RFID tags on objects moving through a manufacturing process, and RFID readers feed this tag information to the Comtrol unit, which in turn feeds the product line controller for real-time routing. Sun's RFID software embedded in the EdgeWare controller communicates real-time information from the plant floor to SAP's AII (Auto-Identification Infrastructure) ERP system. "This facilitates Sarbanes-Oxley compliance because financial reporting is reliable only to the degree the factory control data are accurate and timely," noted Kris Ryberg, director of product development & corporate strategy at Comtrol. "CFO's are seeing payback of six to ten times within a year or two."

Exhibitors at RFID World were diverse in other ways. Vendors like Globe Composite Solutions (GCS) showed RFID-*complementary* products. GCS displayed non-metallic conveyor sections designed to dramatically improve RFID system performance in parcel, distribution, industrial, and other applications. A host of Korean vendors brought geographic diversity. "Many of them came to diversify their sourcing, and expressed satisfaction with new relationships established," according to Shorecliff's events director Kim Allen. "And many have already signed on for next year."

Attendees and exhibitors noted that the increasing number of Gen2-compliant products was generating renewed interest in the market. Recent progress toward critically needed global RFID standards (Gen2 is not a global standard) was described by conference speaker Pat King, global electronics strategist at Michelin Tires. Dr. King spoke of efforts by the Automotive Industry Action Group (AIAG), including Michelin, to facilitate cooperation between EPCglobal and the

International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The successful result was a harmonized way in which tire manufacturers, OEM customers (like Ford), and retailers will present user data on tags, thereby supporting maintenance applications and recalls worldwide. The new protocol can be used to benefit other vertical industries, like pharmaceuticals and aerospace.

Two leading indicators of market acceptance of RFID are the number of individuals receiving RFID technology training, and the volume of business handled by RFID systems integrators, those companies typically asked in first by accounts wishing to commence RFID pilots. RFID World 2006 offered evidence that both are trending upward.

CompTIA (the Computing Technology Industry Association) announced the results of its recent survey of members, indicating a future shortage of the "RFID talent pool". In an effort to upgrade skills, the organization has developed the CompTIA RFID+ Certification, a vendor-neutral program aimed at technology professionals with six to 24 months of experience. "Twenty-two companies representing manufacturers, distributors, systems integrators, education and training providers, and end-users sponsored the program," said David Sommer, CompTIA's vice president of electronic commerce. The first live examination is scheduled for March 28.

RFID4U, an RFID training company exhibiting at the show, highlighted its new, four-day RFID+ Certification Class. Twenty-five classes have been scheduled in various cities through August. In the second quarter, the company will be introducing a CD containing a practice exam. It also offers a number of other training classes for people at all levels of RFID knowledge. "We're seeing more and more end-users enroll in our classes," said Sam Patadia, vice president of engineering, adding, "classes held during the past many months have been full." Rob Sabella, president of OTA, another company offering RFID+ Certification training, roamed the exhibit hall with other OTA'ers distributing "beta copies" of OTA's new "RFID+ Exam Cram" self-study guide. The guide will be available in April. OTA's new certification training program consists of a three-day introductory class already offered and a soon-to-be-offered, two-day class focused on the certification exam. The company will also be introducing a parallel suite of e-learning courses.

Two pure-play RFID integrators exhibiting at the show, Xterprise and ODIN technologies, reported robust growth during the last three years. Steve Hall, senior vice president of global sales at Xterprise, said his company had completed more than 80 projects to date, including more than 30 physical implementations. "While we have assisted and continue to assist many companies complying with retail industry mandates, more than half our projects have not been mandate-driven," he added. ODIN technologies has also completed more than 30 implementations. "Budgeted projects are increasing both in number and size," said Bret Kinsella, chief operating officer at ODIN, "and include everything from active RFID asset management to HF item management." Revenue at both companies is growing at 300 percent per year. "People invest in this technology so they can increase throughput and reduce inventory," Kinsella observed. "RFID is demonstrating it can deliver."