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**Barcodes in manufacturing supply chain resurgence as RFID remains future**



By Brian Tinham

**June 10, 2006 (Manufacturing Computer Solutions)** – Although the last couple of years have seen a lot of RFID pilot studies getting underway, RFID remains in an early adopter phase, lacking significant roll-outs and is likely to remain that way for a very long time.

That's the view at mobile data capture and automation firm Intermec, which is involved with 62 RFID pilot projects across Europe, some 25 of which are in manufacturing. And the firm believes that most of the action for the foreseeable future will remain in barcode technology.

Stuart Scott, senior director of international marketing at Intermec, says that despite the initial enthusiasm and despite the fact that a lot of its projects are in so-called closed loop supply chains where it ought to be easier to achieve a return on investment not least since there is less requirement to wait for global data synchronisation it just isn't moving.

“Even though we can assume benefits with closed loop systems because they are easier to control, and ROI is being derived, it's being done slowly and cautiously.” He names some exceptions, like the automotive sector, which has long benefited specifically from RFID's read/write capabilities, and likewise aerospace.

“The mood has gone negative after the hype,” says Scott. “It's always the way after expectations have been set too high, even though the technology and standards have moved on a long way and we have the benchmark implementation in the Metro store.”

And he adds: “The technology will get even better, and adoption in retail will come although mostly at the case level. But the rest are still many years away.”

The other side of the coin though is that collaborative commerce' remains a key business driver, and for that to function, businesses still need a way to get rapid and accurate visibility into order books and replenishment requirements etc in order to streamline parts supply into manufacturing and on out to customers.

“It's all about visibility, and that's about data sharing, which in turn requires accurate data,” agrees Scott. “And for now that accuracy will come from barcode scanning.”

As a result, Scott believes we're about to witness a new era of revitalised interest in barcodes right across manufacturing, perversely stimulated by the very activity around RFID and its relegation to the back burner. Indeed, he sees industry upping the ante on barcodes and looking to more sophisticated 2D devices, for example.

But he adds: "While a lot of people think they can take advantage of 2D barcodes or maybe RFID, linear barcodes are more than adequate if all they are doing is tracking goods up and down supply chains with a SKU and quantity. The issue is how to make that real-time."

### **About Auto ID Solutions**

Auto ID Solutions is a leading provider of linear and 2D bar code quality tools, providing in-house and on-site NIST traceable calibration and repairs, ISO/ANSI standards interpretation, staff training, and auto identification/bar code quality seminars. They are the only company offering NIST calibration and who tests every verifier to ensure conformance with ISO15426-1 (Bar Code Verifier Conformance Specifications). Headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Auto ID Solutions offers outstanding technical support with dependable delivery and quality. For more information, visit the Auto ID Solutions website at [www.autoidsolutions.net](http://www.autoidsolutions.net).

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